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ORIGEN ON THE SONG OF SONGS AS THE SPIRIT OF SCRIPTURE

THE BRIDEGROOM'S PERFECT MARRIAGE-SONG

J. Christopher King

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For the Revd Clayton D. Crawley and the Revd Dr Owen Carroll

Difficile repperitur qui valeat adscendere ad
Cantica Canticorum.

Origen, Homily 1 on the Song of Songs

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Preface

CHRISTIAN exegesis of the Song of Songs has long interacted creatively with—and, more recently, reacted critically against—the allegorical interpretation developed by Origen of Alexandria (*c.*185–*c.*254) in his *Commentary* and two *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Interest in Origen's exegesis of the Song's narrative elements has dominated past scholarship, which has almost entirely ignored how Origen assesses the Song itself, in its unity as a revealed text. This study aims to show that the *Commentary* and *Homilies*—when read in light of Origen's hermeneutic, his nuptial theology, his understanding of the prophetic mediation of inspired texts, and his doctrine of last things—clearly portray the Song of Songs itself as the biblical book that reveals the 'spirit' of Scripture with greater intensity and immediacy than any other.

For Origen, the reading of Scripture is itself an exercise in spiritual transformation. Through a rightly ordered hermeneutic, calibrated to the precise relation of letter and spirit in the given text, the mind of the reader comes by degrees to reflect—even to shine with—the text's revelatory light, its particular intensity, hue, and tone. Of all the books of the Bible, the one in which Origen seeks both the exemplary hermeneutic and the consummate transformation is the Song of Songs, the Old Testament poem celebrating the pleasures and abundance of love. Here, the narrated love *in* the text coincides perfectly with reader's love *for* the text, both finding their fulfilment and unity in the transforming love of Christ, present in his very person as both Word and Bridegroom.

This study will argue that, in the final analysis, Origen's *Commentary* and two *Homilies on the Song of Songs* portray the Song under two complementary and inseparable aspects: first, as the unique Scripture in which the eschatological nuptials of Christ and his Bride are really present as text; and second, as the spirit of Scripture unveiled, laid bare, and fully manifest in all its erotic power to lure, enflame, and make the reader 'one spirit' with the Lord. To penetrate to the nuptial mystery of the Song is, therefore, to enter fully into the

spirit of Scripture. By extension, to read the Scripture in its spiritual sense must more and more take the character of a nuptial act, driven forward by divine love and ending in knowledge that is not only propositional but finally personal, relational and unitive—knowledge fully given in the Song.

The first part of this study (Introduction and Chapters 1–2) establishes some of the relevant principles of Origen's hermeneutic and clears away prior accounts of his Song exegesis that have obscured the actual foundations of the reading developed in the *Commentary* and *Homilies.* In the subsequent chapters (Chapters 3–5), I argue that Origen's exegetical procedure proves his wholly 'spiritual' reading of the Song to be based on hermeneutical demands, not on psychological or ascetical compulsions. These hermeneutical demands lead Origen to make the greatest conceivable claims for the character of the Song, namely that as the divine Bridegroom's true marriage-song, it mediates his eschatological presence in and through the intelligible structures of the text itself. The Song becomes for Origen the singular biblical book in which is manifestly realized our own espousal to the heavenly Bridegroom, when we hear it as his very own marriage-song with perfect faith and love. In Origen's reading of the Song, preparation becomes consummation; exercise, re-creation; and anticipation, fulfilment in the Bridegroom's nuptial chamber.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis both to the Revd Dr Owen Carroll, whose care for me during the course of this project was both provident and paternal; and to the Revd Clayton Crawley, whose confidence and support have sustained me through years of research and writing.

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Abbreviations

Full references to all works cited in the text or notes may be found in the Select Bibliography. Early Christian writings, including the works of Origen, are cited in the notes by the standard Latin titles and abbreviations found in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon,* pp. ix–xliii.

ACW	*Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation,* ed. W. J. Burghardt, T. C. Lawlor, and J. J. Dillon (New York)
ATR	*Anglican Theological Review*
GCS	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Berlin, 1897–)
HTR	*Harvard Theology Review*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
OPA	*Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie*, ed. R. Arnaldez, J. Pouilloux, C. Mondésert (Paris, 1961–)
PG	*Patrologia Graeca,* ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857–86)
RSR	*Recherches de Science Religieuse*
SC	*Sources Chrétiennes*, ed. H. de Lubac, J. Daniélou, *et al.* (Paris, 1942–)
SP	*Studia Patristica*
ST	*Studia Theologica*
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*

The sources for translations are noted in the text, with the following exceptions. English translations of Origen's *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song of Songs* are taken from R. P. Lawson, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies, ACW* 26 (London, 1957), except where my own rendering is indicated. English translations of *On First Principles* and *Against Celsus* are from G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles* (London, 1973) and H. Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, 1980) respectively, unless otherwise noted. Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (*NRSV*).

Introduction

ORIGEN, THE NUPTIAL MOTIF, AND EARLY CHRISTIAN READINGS OF THE SONG OF SONGS

We have only to look to the New Testament to find nuptial imagery extended in explicitly theological and religious directions for a nascent Christianity. Rooted in the human praxis of marriage and informed by biblical precedent, such imagery drew into the unity of a single motif the relational nature of God's covenant with humanity and the primacy of love, realized in Christ's deeds, as its abiding character. The Old Testament, for its part, portrays Yahweh as bridegroom and spouse (Is. 62: 5; Hos. 1–3) and Israel as the Bride of God (Is. 49: 18; 61: 10; 62: 4; Jer. 2: 1–3; 3: 1–5), though the theological application of this imagery is not uniformly triumphal or celebratory.[1] In turn, the New Testament appropriates these traditions in light of realized Messianic hopes, reinterpreting them as universal and eschatological signs.[2]

In Matthew 9: 15, for example, Jesus identifies himself as the 'bridegroom', whose presence abrogates the ordinary disciplines of Jewish ascesis for his followers until '[he is] taken away from them', this clause conjoining to the nuptial element an eschatological theme which is again picked up in parables of the marriage feast (Matt. 22: 1–14) and of the bridegroom and the five wise and five foolish virgins (Matt. 25: 1–13). Ephesians 5: 21–7 explicitly likens the human nuptial

[1] The symbol as it is used in Jeremiah, for example, forbids a reunion between God and his estranged spouse. This is opposite in effect to the use of the same imagery in Hosea and utterly different from the exultant tone of the passages from Deutero-Isaiah. See G. P. Couturier, 'Jeremiah' in *The New Jerome Bible Commentary* (London, 1990), 271–3.

[2] Indeed, the Messianic realignment of the nuptial motif has already begun in the OT itself, where Psalm 45—the royal marriage-ode—overlays the Davidic kingship with qualities unique to the kingship of Yahweh; later Jewish interpretation (and probably the author of Ps. 45: 1) transferred this whole psalm to the awaited Messiah. See C. Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ: An Enquiry into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity* (London, 1939), 35–7.

bond to the relation of Christ to his Church. And at last, in the eschatological drama that unfolds in Revelation, the New Jerusalem—clearly John's symbol for the community of the saints—descends as a 'bride adorned for her husband' (21: 2) so as to take her place at 'the marriage of the lamb' (19: 7).

Thus, the ease with which marriage as both a natural and revealed human covenant of love could be associated with God's covenant of love guaranteed that even in the first, creative moments of Christianity, the Church would come to be understood as a spiritual Bride, wedded mystically to Christ her Spouse. Not surprisingly, then, nuptial imagery acquired a durable and increasing prominence in the teaching and worship of early Christians, even while the rite of marriage itself waited for centuries to receive a uniquely ecclesiastical and sacramental form of its own.[3] Among writings of the subapostolic period, the *Shepherd of Hermas* (*c.* 148) most plainly shows the first evidence of an early openness to nuptial symbolism. Although it does not explicitly invoke the nuptial theme in its allegories, it does portray the Church with features strongly suggestive of a deliberate if allusive nuptial construction: the personification of Church as a perpetually and paradoxically youthful old woman,[4] enthroned and carried about on a chair in the manner of a Middle Eastern bride,[5] for whom the world was created (perhaps as a dowry?).[6]

In *2 Clement* (*c.*150), the theological use of nuptial imagery becomes more explicit and is now entwined with an analogy between Christ's ecclesial body and his incarnate flesh. The author explains:

Now I imagine that you are not ignorant that the living 'Church is the body of Christ' (*ἐκκλησία ζῶσα σῶμα ἐστιν Χριστοῦ*). For the Scripture says, 'God made man male and female'; the male is Christ, the female is the

[3] E. Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (London, 1965), 272–343, argues that marriage as an exclusively ecclesiastical contract did not emerge in the West until between the 11th and 13th cents., notwithstanding the fact that marriage had already been interpreted sacramentally and typologically. For a less conventional view, see K. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (New York, 1983), esp. 3–32, who contends that early Christians assimilated Jewish marriage customs to their own religious context and symbolism.

[4] *Vis.* 1.2 (Loeb 25. 10–12), 3.10 (Loeb 25. 52–4).

[5] *Vis.* 1.4 (Loeb 25. 14–16).

[6] *Vis.* 2.4. (Loeb 25. 24). For further discussion of nuptial imagery in the *Shepherd*, see Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ*, 110–15.

Church (τὸ ἄρσεν ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός, τὸ θῆλυ ἡ ἐκκλησία). And moreover the books and the Apostles declare that the Church belongs not to the present, but has existed from the beginning; for she was spiritual, as was also our Jesus, but he was made manifest in the last days that he might save us; and the Church, which is spiritual, was made manifest in the flesh of Christ (ἡ ἐκκλησία δὲ πνε υματικὴ οὖσα ἐφανερώθη ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ Χριστοῦ), showing us that if any of us guard her in the flesh without corruption, he shall receive her back again in the Holy Spirit.[7]

An early baptismal hymn, attributed to Melito of Sardis and preserved in the Bodmer Papyrus, invites the newly initiated to exult as 'brides and bridegrooms' who have found their 'bridegroom, Christ' and enjoy 'wine' at a nuptial banquet.[8] Finally, the Syrian *Odes of Solomon*, which likewise are very probably a collection of primitive baptismal hymns, are suffused with theological images that incorporate the Christian believer into the nuptial character of the Bride-church.[9] These traditions were to be woven themselves seamlessly into the works of the most prolific Fathers of the late second and early third century—Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Clement of Alexandria—who retained the nuptial motif as an important biblical and theological convention.[10]

Yet, it is only with Origen of Alexandria (*c.*185–*c.*254) that a significant attempt is made to explore the full theological potential of the marriage motif. Unlike earlier Fathers, who make only a limited theological use of nuptial imagery, Origen gives it a new primacy that corresponds to the singular status of love (whether *erôs* or *agapê*)

[7] 2 *Clem.* 14.2–3 (Loeb 24. 150–1).

[8] See Papyrus Bodmer 12 (*SC* 123. 128–9): Ὑμνήσατε τὸν πατέρα οἱ ἅγιοι, ᾄσατε τῇ μητρὶ παρθένοι. Ὑμνοῦμεν, ὑπερυψοῦμεν, ἅγιοι. Ὑψώθητη, νύμφαι καὶ νυμφίοι, ὅτιηὕ ρατε τὸν νυμφίον ὑμῶν Χριστόν. Εἰς οἶνον, πίετε, νύμφαι καὶ νυμφίοι. The hymn is particularly interesting not only for its antiquity but also for its identification of the individual initiate with the Bride of Christ. This usage suggests that well before Origen developed his 'psychological' allegory of the heavenly nuptials, there already existed precedent in mainstream Christian circles for understanding the soul to be a bride of Christ. While Origen might have consolidated and systematized this tradition in view of a more philosophical definition of the soul, the claim that a psychological reading is his invention and a diversion from a pristine communitarian reading of the nuptial motif cannot be sustained. For this latter view, see Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ*, 173–6, who criticizes Origen along lines determined largely by A. von Harnack.

[9] J. H. Charlesworth (ed. and tr.), *The Odes of Solomon* (Oxford, 1973); see esp. Odes 3 (pp. 18–20), 8 (pp. 39–44), 19 (pp. 81–4), 38 (pp. 129–34), 42 (pp. 143–8).

[10] For these, see Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ*, 110–34.

in his theology.[11] The nuptial theme colours Origen's thinking about all aspects of Christian faith and morals: creation, fall, redemption, glorification, the Church, the nature of the soul, the Christian life and, above all, the hidden life of the Holy Trinity. Moreover, at no time in his career was Origen unconcerned with it, as H. Crouzel indicates: 'Le thème que nous étudions est attesté par des oeuvres appartenant à toute la vie d'Origène, depuis le livre I du *Commentaire sur Jean* ou le *Commentaire sur les Lamentations,* oeuvres composées à Alexandrie, jusqu'aux homélies prononcées dans les dernières années.'[12]

Origen avails himself of the marriage motif with a corresponding frequency in some of his most important extant works, to a lesser extent in *On Prayer, Exhortation to Martyrdom,* and *Against Celsus,* and with central importance in parts of Book 14 of his *Commentary on Matthew* and Book 3 of his *Commentary on First Corinthians.*[13] It is arguable as well that a theology of the spiritual nuptials is deeply implicate in Origen's reasoning throughout *On First Principles*, particularly in his treatment of questions relating to the 'soul of Jesus' and its loving mode of union with the Logos.[14] His development of the nuptial motif, however, reaches its greatest intensity and coherence in his great *Commentary* and two *Homilies on the Song of Songs.*[15]

Before Origen's great burst of creative engagement with the Song, this 'little book' (*libellum*; *βιβλαρίδιον*), as Origen calls it in the first line of the *Commentary* and onwards,[16] received scant attention from Christian thinkers. The New Testament itself makes no direct refer-

[11] The definitive exploration of Origen's theology of love is H. Pietras, *L'amore in Origene*, Studia Ephemerides 'Augustinianum' 28 (Rome, 1988); for discussion of its general relevance to the structure of his theology as a whole, see pp. 7–11, 57–70.

[12] *Origène*, (Paris, 1985), 168.

[13] See *Or.* 17.2 (*GCS* 3. 339–40), 20.1 (*GCS* 3. 343–4), 29.9 (*GCS* 3. 385); *Mart.* 9–10 (*GCS* 2. 9–11); *Cels.* 8.55–7 (*SC* 150. 298–304); *Comm. in Mt.* 14 (*GCS* 40. 271–348); *Comm. in I Cor.* frag. 33–9, *JTS* 9 (1908), 500–10.

[14] See *Princ.* 2.6.3 (*SC* 252. 314–16), where Origen draws an analogy between the union of spouses in 'one flesh' (Matt. 19: 5,6, from Gen. 2: 24) and the union of the Logos and the 'soul of Jesus' in 'one spirit' (1 Cor. 6: 17).

[15] Important general studies of the Song are M. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 7C (New York, 1977); A. Robert and R. Tournay (ed. and tr.), *Le Cantique des Cantiques: traduction et commentaire* (Paris, 1963); O. Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, tr. F. J. Gaiser (Minneapolis, 1994).

[16] *Cant.* prol. 1.1 (*GCS* 375. 82 *passim*).

ence to the Song. Furthermore, most scholars agree that the Song had no direct effect upon the authors of the New Testament.[17] Yet, to the extent that the New Testament already seeks in marriage a sign of Christ and his Church (Eph. 5: 22; Rev. 19: 21), it affirms its commitment to a biblical tradition of high nuptial metaphor in light of which the Song itself, with a certain inevitability, has been interpreted by the greater part of Jewish and Christian authorities.

Important as the nuptial motif may have been to the patristic tradition leading up to Origen, there is little evidence that the Song contributed to it significantly. Some of the imagery employed by the *Odes of Solomon* is, perhaps, more than a little reminiscent of the Song, especially in its peculiar turns of phrase;[18] and the attribution of the *Odes* to Solomon might be intended to evoke a reminiscence of his love-poem as well, although R. Harris and A. Mingana perceive a greater dependency upon the Wisdom of Solomon than upon the Song.[19] Apart from a short typological commentary written by Hippolytus—which anticipates Origen in seeing Christ and his elect community in the Bridegroom and Bride[20]—reference to the mainstream patristic tradition before Origen produces only a

[17] 'The New Testament offers no help for understanding the *Song*', writes R. Murphy, 'Patristic and Medieval Exegesis', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (Oct., 1981), 507. See also J. A. Montgomery, *The Song of Songs: a Symposium* (Philadelphia, 1924), 18. Opposing opinions have been cogently argued. M. Cambe, 'L'influence du *Cantique des Cantiques* sur le Nouveau Testament', *Revue Thomiste* 62 (1962), 5–26, for one, has found the harmony of nuptial imagery between the Song and the New Testament too tight to be coincidental. Still, his claim asks too much of the evidence; for those passages from the New Testament reminiscent of the Song do not, in fact, speak of nuptiality. A bouquet of such putative allusions can be gathered from John's gospel, and we see in each case no reference to the mysteries of Bride and Bridegroom. Perhaps, then, it is overgenerous to suggest, as does P. Meloni, that 'the echo of the *Song* resounds in the gospel'; the 'echo', if it is there at all, is exceedingly faint.

[18] Compare e.g. Odes 3.2 ('And His members are with Him, and I am dependent on them; and He loves me') and 3.6 ('I love the Beloved and I myself love Him', tr. J. H. Charlesworth, 19) to Song 6:3a ('I am my beloved's and he is mine') and 7:10 ('I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me'). Also compare Ode 19.3, with its startling allusion to the Lord's breasts ('Because His breasts were full, and it was undesirable that His milk should be ineffectually released', tr. Charlesworth, 82) to LXX Song 1:2 ('Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your breasts [μαστοί σού] are better than wine').

[19] See *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, ii 2 (Manchester, 1920), 69–72.

[20] In addition to a few fragments preserved in Armenian, Syriac, Paleoslavonic, and Greek, the most complete transmission of the text occurs in two related Georgian manuscripts, which may be found in 'Traités d'Hippolyte sur David et Goliath, sur le

handful of direct citations of the Song from which it is nearly impossible to generalize. None of these provides a systematic reading of any text of the Song, and they only invoke its verses sparingly, as proof texts for arguments unrelated to the Song itself.

TRANSMISSION OF ORIGEN'S EXEGESIS OF THE SONG OF SONGS

The commentary from Origen's youth

Origen's *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song* belong to the period of his mature exegesis, in the years following his exile from Alexandria to the Palestinian diocese of Caesarea in 233 or 234. Yet, long before this relocation, the Song had already been a subject of deep interest for Origen; as a young man he had composed a short commentary—now lost—on it. The loss of this early commentary deprives modern readers of an important source for assessing the development of Origen's mind. It would be fair to assume that we are deprived of a significant spiritual treasure as well.

What is known of this early commentary is, regrettably, so meagre that few airtight determinations can be made about it. Two sources do attest authoritatively to its existence. First, Jerome's *Epistle 33*, written to Paula, preserves an extended list of Origen's writings, including the following reference: 'He wrote . . . ten books on the Song of Songs and, moreover, two other texts that he wrote as a youth.'[21] P. Nautin[22] suggests that Jerome has copied his list from

Cantique des Cantiques et sur l'Antéchrist', ed. and tr. (Latin) G. Garitte, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 15–16 (Louvain, 1965). See also the Greek paraphrase of the same text in M. Richard, 'Une Paraphrase Grecque Résumée du Commentaire d'Hippolyte sur le Cantique des Cantiques', *Le Muséon* 77 (1964), 140–54.

[21] 'Scripsit . . . in Canticum Canticorum libros X et alios tomos II, quos super scripsit in adulescentia', *Ep.* 33.4 (Epistulae, ed. I. Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 54–6 (Leipzig, 1910), i.257). It is not likely that Jerome is speaking of Origen's two *Homilies*, since he knows these to be works of his maturity (*Hom. in Cant.* prol. (*SC* 3bis. 62)).

[22] P. Nautin, *Origène: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris, 1977). On the importance of Nautin's contribution to future studies of Origen, see R. J. Daly, 'Origen Studies and Pierre Nautin's *Origène*', *JTS* 39 (1978), 508–19.

Eusebius' *Life of Pamphilius*;[23] but, whatever the original source, the authority of this evidence remains strong. Our second source, from the *Philocalia* (compiled from Origen's writings by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory Nazianzen), makes reference to a 'small volume on the Song, which was written by Origen in his youth'.[24]

It is our good fortune that Basil and Gregory also record a passage from this work as an illustration of Origen's hermeneutical reasoning. Its content—which concerns the mysterious comings and goings of characters in the Song—reveals Origen's special concern for establishing the logical coherence and sequence of biblical texts. While the text itself does not reappear even in modified form in what remains of the later *Commentary*, its argument carries over as a central premise behind Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Song. We shall look more closely at this passage in Chapter 3. For the moment, we need only see that the text is indisputably from Origen's own hand.

How early did Origen write this first commentary on the Song? Eusebius records that Origen only began writing his 'commentaries on the divine Scriptures' (*τῶν εἰς τὰς θείας γραφὰς ὑπομνημάτων*) during the first part of Alexander Severus' reign (222–35).[25] But this would make Origen at least 35–37 years old at the time of composing this commentary, hardly the 'youth' spoken of by both Jerome and the *Philocalia*. Their double testimony weighs against including the early commentary in the period identified by Eusebius. Accordingly, Nautin moves its date back to *c.*213, when Origen would have been 26 or 27 years of age.[26]

Might Origen's first Song commentary be plausibly dated even earlier, to the latter half decade of the Severan persecution (206–11),

[23] Nautin, *Origène*, 58 (n. 35), 227.

[24] *ἐκ το εἰς τὸ ᾿Ασμα μίκρου τόμου, ὅν ἐν τῇ νεότητι ἔγραψεν ᾿Ωριγένῆ* *Philoc.* 7.1 (*SC* 302. 328). The two sources for the early *Commentary* tradition, however, do not seem to be in total agreement over its original shape, in that Jerome refers to two books and the *Philocalia* only to one. The difficulty, in any case, seems only slight. Perhaps the Cappadocians had only one part of the original text and mistook it for the whole. Or perhaps Origen's original text was so brief that they naturally spoke of it as a single work. But the existence of an early *Commentary* is beyond dispute. See H. Crouzel, introduction to *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (*SC* 375. 10) and Nautin, *Origène*, 250.

[25] *HE* 6.23.1 (Loeb 265. 68).

[26] *Origène*, 418.

when Origen would only have been between 19 and 25 years of age? We know from Eusebius that during his period of early prominence as a Christian teacher in Alexandria (204 >), Origen was offering constant support to the martyrs, visiting them in prison, attending their trials, and even 'greeting them with a kiss' at their executions.[27] Now, from his much later *Exhortation to Martyrdom* (*c.*235), we learn of the prominence that he gave to the martyr's 'bridal' status before Christ the Bridegroom, wherein martyrdom and exaltation to heavenly nuptial union become indistinguishable.[28] In *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 31, furthermore, Origen uses Song 2: 10–11 ('My beloved answers and says to me, "Arise and come away, my love, my fair one, my dove; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone" ') to typify the new life that will flourish in the soul after the 'winter' of tribulation has been endured.[29]

Perhaps, then, even during the Severan persecutions, Origen had already developed a nuptial understanding of martyrdom and, thus realizing the Song's relevance to the persecutions that so preoccupied him, applied himself to a short exegesis of the text at this time.[30] Significantly, this period also marks his abandonment of profane for sacred studies, an intellectual conversion that we might plausibly tie to his sobering experiences of personal loss, particularly the death of his father Leonidas, and his option for divine love over worldly affections. If Nautin is correct, Origen deliberately marked his intellectual and affective conversion through this early Song commentary, a text of biblical exegesis given over to the theme of heavenly love.[31]

[27] *HE* 6.3.4 (Loeb 265. 40).

[28] *Mart.* 9–10 (*GCS* 2. 9–11). According to P. Bright, 'Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom and Its Biblical Framework', in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. C. Kannengieser and W. L. Petersen (Notre Dame, 1988), 182, Origen employs the nuptial motif to convey and reinforce his 'psychic view of salvation', principally in terms of the 'paradoxical "losing" and "saving" of the soul'.

[29] *Mart.* 31 (*GCS* 2. 27).

[30] L. Brésard, 'Un Texte d'Origène: l'échelle des cantiques', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 39 (1989), 7, observes, 'Origène n'est pas un maître spirituel renfrongé. Il sait que Dieu est joie parce qu'il est Vie—la joie est l'expression de la vie réussie— . . . et sans doute, avec son amour pour la personne du Christ, avons-nous là une des causes de son aspiration au martyre.'

[31] *Origène*, 417–18. Nautin, however, departs from Eusebius, *HE* 6.3.8–9 (Loeb 265. 18–20) in moving this 'conversion' to the reign of Caracalla (211–17).

Whatever its date, the existence of this early Song commentary—probably Origen's first work on holy Scripture—proves that his study of the Song was neither instigated simply by the necessities of lectionary-based preaching in the Caesarean church; nor by his late attunement by Palestinian rabbis to the mystical possibilities and allegorical uses of the Song; nor finally by the need to 'round out' his pan-biblical exegesis with an analysis of the Song. Origen's personal history as an exegete is bounded on both ends by a concentrated search for the spiritual depths of the Song. Nearly his whole theological project is comprehended, in the most literal sense, by his study of the Song—a fact that offers powerful testimony to its unique status in his understanding of Scripture as a whole.

Relative dating of the *Commentary* and *Homilies*

Which did Origen write first, then, the two *Homilies* or the ten books of the great *Commentary on the Song*? From the information provided by Eusebius, we know that Origen began writing the first five books of his *Commentary on the Song* during his second voyage to Athens—probably around 245—and completed the latter five upon returning to his home in Caesarea, sometime between 246 and 247.[32] Composed only some five years before his death sometime after June 251,[33] they belong to the period of his greatest theological maturity and bear the distinctive marks of the changes that had overtaken his mind since his early career.

Apart from Nautin's biography of Origen, the weight of contemporary Origen scholarship situates the *Homilies* very near the end of Origen's life and after the composition of the *Commentary on the Song*. It is Eusebius who seems to argue most forcefully for this later dating of the *Homilies*:

> ...it is said that Origen, who was over sixty years of age, inasmuch as he had now acquired immense facility from long preparation, permitted

[32] *HE* 6.32.1–2 (Loeb 265. 84).

[33] Nautin's careful biographical reconstruction proves that Origen's death, following imprisonment and torture during the Decian persecution, might have occurred at any time between this date and 254 or 255, the years in which Origen is more traditionally thought to have died; see *Origène*, 412, 441.

shorthand-writers to take down the discourses (διαλέξεις) delivered by him in public, a thing that he had never before allowed.[34]

Does Eusebius use *dialexeis* to mean 'sermons'? If so, then this passage would apparently refer to the period when Origen's Caesarean sermons were first committed to writing. Given that Origen was born around the year 185, Eusebius' statement would then situate the delivery of the *Homilies*, including those on the Song, to some time in the years from 245 and following. This dating would seem to be further confirmed by the fact that Origen's Old Testament sermon cycle ends abruptly with his exposition of 1 Samuel rather than carrying on with the remaining historical books. The interruption could be attributed to the Church persecutions under Decius, during which Origen suffered tortures that would eventually bring about his death.[35]

Closer scrutiny, however, suggests that this late date for the *Homilies* is incorrect. In the first place, Eusebius emphasizes that the *dialexeis* were made publicly (ἐπὶ τοῦ κοινοῦ). Yet, the subject-matter of Origen's *Homilies*—the application of Scripture to the Christian life—would be strictly of intramural interest to the gathered *ekklêsia*. Sections of the *Homilies on the Song*, in any case, are addressed to catechumens.[36] We know moreover that Origen did, in fact, discourse, teach, and debate with pagan and Jewish interlocutors in the city square throughout his Caesarean years. We may reasonably conclude that *dialexeis* refers to such discourses as these, not to the homilies.

There is a second argument against a later date for the *Homilies on the Song*—namely the form and contents of Origen's homiletic corpus. Since there exists no record of more than one homily cycle on any given biblical book, Nautin argues that all of Origen's *Homilies* appear to have been given in the context of a single teaching series, probably following the pattern of a three-year lectionary cycle in the Caesarean church.[37] Now, in the extant parts of the *Commentary on*

[34] *HE* 6.36.1 (Loeb 265. 88–91).

[35] I agree with Nautin that *Hom. in Jos.* 9.10 (*SC* 71. 268), commonly thought to allude obliquely to the Decian persecution, cannot be reasonably assigned to this period. See *Origène*, 401–2.

[36] *Hom. in Cant.* 2.7 (*SC* 37bis. 126–7).

[37] *Origène*, 401–5.

the Song, Origen cites his *Homilies* on Judges and Numbers.[38] Obviously, then, these *Homilies* were written prior to the *Commentary*. Moreover, Origen almost certainly delivered his *Homilies on Numbers* after those on the Song, so we can be reasonably sure that the *Commentary on the Song* postdates the *Homilies* as well.[39] It would seem, then, that Origen gave the two *Homilies on the Song* sometime between 241 and 242, some few years before his departure for the journey that occasioned his authorship of the *Commentary*.

Significance of the relative dates of the Commentary and Homilies on the Song

We have argued the relative chronology of the *Homilies* and *Commentary on the Song* so as to establish which of them represents Origen's 'last word' on the Song's significance and its interpretation. It should be said that a basic vocabulary of allegorical conventions links the *Homilies* and the *Commentary* in a common idiom, and Origen does not deviate from these. The way, for example, that he allegorizes the whole 'dramatic' structure of the Song—both as to form (changing scenes and acts) and roles (Bridegroom, Bride, and so on)—is identical for both readings in every significant respect. Superficially, only one difference seems to separate the two expositions. Whereas the *Commentary* develops a consistent 'psychological' interpretation, in which the Bride and her movements designate with sometimes philosophical precision the soul and its acts, the *Homilies* set forth a moral teaching in which the same concern for the soul has been reshaped to suit the needs of an intellectually diverse Christian community for training in the life of grace.

Yet, the *Commentary*, particularly in the Prologue, does develop a thread of interpretation only hinted at—and perhaps barely anticipated—in the *Homilies*: the unique attribution of the Song as marriage-song (epithalamium) to Christ the Bridegroom alone: 'this

[38] See *Cant.* prol. 4.9 (*SC* 375. 152) and *Cant.* 2.1.25 (*SC* 375. 274).

[39] Although counter-intuitive, this position is confirmed by evidence internal to his homily cycle, which demonstrates that Origen expounded the OT in the following order: Wisdom literature (including the Song), Prophets, Histories (including the book of Numbers). See Nautin, *Origène*, 403.

song is the very one that the Bridegroom himself was to sing as his marriage-hymn, when about to take his Bride'.[40] In other words, by the time he writes the *Commentary*, Origen has quite definitely come to understand that it is the Saviour's unaccompanied voice that the reader comes to hear in and as the text of the Song. Having come to the end of an interior nuptial journey, which is also a structured advance through the intelligibilia of scriptural texts, the reader knows himself truly to be the Bride, worthy and prepared to receive the fecundating *ipsissima verba* of the Bridegroom, Solomon the Peaceable King. Our discussion will later show precisely how Origen takes up this position in the *Commentary*, shaping his whole conception of the Song to its implications.

Consequently, we shall discover as our study unfolds that both the role of Solomon the prophet and the identity of that other, christological 'Solomon' named in the opening lines of the Song take on a special importance for Origen's entire conception of the text. Thus Origen confers a special prominence upon these notions in his account of the Song and, especially, in his efforts to trace the text to origins that are, so I shall argue, entirely metaphysical and superhistorical. For the purposes of this study, then, we shall lean more heavily upon the great *Commentary on the Song* than upon the *Homilies*, not only because it is weightier than the *Homilies* but also because its theology of the textual mediation of 'spirit' is more fully developed.

The present condition and value of the *Commentary* and *Homilies* on the Song

The *Commentary* and *Homilies*, unfortunately, are only imperfectly preserved. Apart from various Greek fragments and scholia,[41] our

[40] '... istud vero unum canticum est, quod ipsi iam sponso sponsam suam suscepturo epithalamii specie erat canendum', *Cant.* prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 148), my translation.

[41] See *Philoc.* 27.13 (*SC* 226. 310–14) = *Cant.* 2.2.16–19 (*SC* 375. 306–10) and the fragments in the catena-commentary ascribed to Procopius of Gaza, *PG* 17.253–88 and *PG* 87.2.1545–1790. As Crouzel observes [*SC* 376. 741], the catena fragments collected by Procopius were probably not copied verbatim from Origen's original Greek. Rather, it is more likely that they were intended to be a digest and thus are not so reliable an index as the translation of Rufinus.

only significant witnesses to these works exist in Latin translation—first, the *Homilies* handed down to us by Jerome, reading the Song only up to verse 3: 15; and second, Rufinus' version of the ten-volume *Commentary*, of which considerably more than half is now missing and which, in any case, Rufinus might never have brought to completion.[42] Although Rufinus is generally thought to have significantly altered the text in translation, all confusions—or seeming confusions—can be explained without supposing that he has produced a truncated adaptation of the *Commentary*. Jerome's version of the *Homilies* is free of similar suspicions. Apart from the loss of nuance inevitable in any translation, the legacies of Rufinus and Jerome provide us a sound apparatus for interpreting this most original interpreter of the Song.

We are, nevertheless, poorer for the losses sustained by the Greek textual tradition. These losses are felt even more acutely since Origen's writings were to set the standard for almost all later Christian exegesis of the Song. A. Pelletier writes of this influence:

> Situées elles aussi à l'orée de l'âge patristique, les lectures origéniennes du Ct. représentent, plus encore, la source indiscutable, constamment désignée, de l'interprétation traditionelle du poéme. Divers auteurs ont montré comment, soit par référence explicite, soit par influence tacite, ou par osmose invisible, ce qu'Origène a expliqué et décrit commande les lectures spirituelles qui furent faites du Ct. au long des siècles.[43]

It is now all the more difficult, for instance, to gauge exactly how far Origen influenced Gregory of Nyssa in his reading of the Song[44] or how a complete version of Origen's *Commentary* might have given further shape to the medieval European exegesis that it already influenced so much.[45] Yet, enough of the *Commentary* remains to

[42] Crouzel speculates that the *Commentary on the Song* was the last translation undertaken by Rufinus and so was probably interrupted by his death. Such a misfortune would explain not only the incompleteness of the translation but also its curious lack of any preface by Rufinus, a feature typical of his other translations.

[43] *Lectures du Cantique des Cantiques: De L'enigme du sens aux figures du lecteur*, Analecta Biblica 121 (Rome, 1989), 227–8.

[44] On this matter, see C. W. Macleod, 'Allegory and Mysticism in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa', *JTS* 22 (1971), 362–79.

[45] For Origen's influence on the medieval Christian exegesis of the Song, see G. Lavigne, ' "Hiddenness" in the Commentaries of Origen and Gilbert of Hoyland on the Song of Songs', *Cistercian Studies* 28:3/4 (1993), 231–40; E. A. Matter, *The Voice*

prove the genius and distinctiveness of Origen's interpretation of the Song. In its unity of conception, it clearly surpasses all earlier readings of this biblical text. But more than this, it embodies a new and robust flowering of nuptial imagery as a basis for teaching the Christian faith.

Thus, the *Commentary on the Song*, and to a lesser extent the two *Homilies*, give tangible measure of the high status held by the nuptial motif in Origen's theology. We see this above all in the superlative literary merit of the *Commentary* itself—a judgment that a reading of this text alongside Origen's other expository works will confirm for the interested reader. Jerome himself, later so hostile to Origen, may be called as a witness: 'While Origen surpassed all writers in his other books, in his *Song of Songs* he surpassed himself... And this exposition of his is so splendid and clear, that it seems to me that the words, "The King brought me into His chamber", have found their fulfilment in him.'[46]

The *Commentary*, moreover, becomes an occasion for Origen to innovate in ways that will augment, or at least shape, Christian reading of the Song itself for centuries to come. Origen sees in the dramatic encounter between the speakers in the Song an image, a living icon, of the complex relationship that exists between Christ and his Bride—a role enacted in different but analogous ways both by the individual soul and by the Church which is, as Origen says, 'of many souls' (*ex multis animabus*).[47] Origen's Christian exegesis of the Song begins with the christological treatment of the Bridegroom held in common with the earlier Christian tradition, particularly Hippolytus, and following the New Testament pattern which we examined above, he identifies the Bride with the Spouse of Christ, the Church. Finally, pursuing the logic of the doctrine of the Mystical Body to its conclusion, he takes this exegesis one step further by clothing the

of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity (Philadelphia, 1990), 20–48; and D. Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies Series 156 (Kalamazoo, 1995), 94–8, 109–13, 114–17, 135–8.

[46] 'Origenes, cum in ceteris libris omnes vicerit, in Cantico Canticorum ipse se vicit ... ita magnifice aperteque disseruit, ut mihi videatur in eo completum esse, quod dicitur: Introduxit me rex in cubiculum suum', *Hom. in Cant.* prol. (*SC* 37bis. 62).

[47] *Cant.* 2.6.13 (*SC* 375. 388).

Christian soul, the individual member of the Mystical Body, with the attributes of the whole Bride-Church.

Thus Origen's exegesis does not confer on the Bride a single and fixed value. Instead, she becomes an ever-appreciating commodity in the economy of salvation, being neither exclusively the individual soul nor exclusively the perfect Church (i.e. the redeemed rational creation). The Bride is, on Origen's reading, both soul and Church—individual and collective person—conceived in the light of a continuous, ordered, voluntary progress towards the perfection that will be fully unveiled only at the end of the ages. In other words, the principal realities in the drama of the Song are persons—principally the Bridegroom-Christ, the Bride-Church, and the Bride-soul—whose actions and loving interactions form the very sinews of the text.[48]

In this way, the *Commentary* manifests a new degree of mystical 'personalism' that will mark it as the first substantial work of affective spirituality in the history of Christian writing.[49] Such personalism is visible in Origen's rendering of the Song as a tale of maturing erotic reciprocity between Bridegroom and Bride, in whom he sees not only the Church (as collective *prosōpon*) but also the soul (as individual *psychê*). He thereby identifies in the text a psychological dimension barely anticipated in the earlier tradition and not much exceeded but much imitated in the later. While Origen's reading of the Song 'lacks', so P. Grant observes, 'the sense of anguished contingency' of the personal self more characteristic of Augustine,[50] it is equally true, as Grant himself admits, that it is nevertheless in the *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song* that Origen is most clearly seen as a

[48] See *Cant.* prol. 1.1–3 (*SC* 375. 80–2) and *pass.*

[49] The first major study of Origen's mystical theology is the groundbreaking work of W. Völker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes: eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Frömmigkeit und zu den Anfängen christlicher Mystik*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 7 (Tübingen, 1931). Despite the criticisms that have been aimed at Völker's rather overdrawn portrait of Origen as mystic, his description of Origen's thought as an 'intellectual mysticism' (p. 74) gets nearer the truth than does the 'mystical intellectualism' that E. de Faye ascribes to Origen (*Origène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, v. 3 (Paris, 1928), 265). For an appreciation, valuable in its own right, of Völker's contribution, see H.-C. Puech, 'Un livre récent sur la mystique d'Origène', *Revue d'Historique et de Philosophie Religieuses* (1933), 508–36.

[50] P. Grant, *Spiritual Discourse and the Meaning of Persons* (New York, 1994), 53.

'begetter of a spirituality with a bearing on what [is meant] by "personal" ' in the later mystical tradition.[51]

This personalism gives Origen a freedom of self-disclosure that has baffled scholars intent upon construing him as a mere philosophical rationalist or as 'a mystic *manqué*', to use E. R. Dodds's characterization.[52] One finds, for example, such moments as this well-known passage from *Homily 1 on the Song*, in which Origen digresses upon his own exegetical experience of the Bridegroom's alluring elusiveness in the sacred text:

> The Bride then beholds the Bridegroom; and He, as soon as she has seen Him, goes away. He does this frequently throughout the Song; and that is something nobody can understand who has not suffered it himself. God is my witness that I have often perceived the Bridegroom drawing near me and being most intensely present with me; then suddenly He has withdrawn and I could not find Him, though I sought to do so. I long, therefore, for Him to come again, and sometimes He does so. Then, when He has appeared and I lay hold of Him, He slips away once more; and when He has so slipped away, my search for Him begins anew.[53]

Origen, make note, has inserted himself personally into the action portrayed in the Song, identifying himself experientially with and as the Bride. Indeed, it is a startling enough leap of interpretation to require that Origen swear—'God is my witness!' (*Deus testis est*)—to the truth of it.

True, Origen is describing an experience of textual interpretation here. Yet, it is only an impoverished attitude towards texts and their reading that could construe the hermeneutical process as necessarily counter- or sub-affective.[54] In Origen, allegory and mystical experience converge in a unitary symbolic language, which expresses the

[51] P. Grant, *Spiritual Discourse and the Meaning of Persons* (New York, 1994), 67.

[52] *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965), 98.

[53] *Hom. in Cant.* 1.7 (*SC* 37bis. 94–6).

[54] In his study of Origen's theology of 'mystical knowledge', Crouzel argues that even if Origen's *modus operandi* is intellectual and speculative, his primary aim is the properly mystical one of union with God: 'Une grande erudition sacrée et profane, peut aider à voir la volonté de la Parole de Dieu, mais le but est d'entrer dans la pensée divine et de l'incorporer à tout son ētre. Le cōté intellectuel est secondaire et subordonné'; see *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'*, Museum Lessianum, section théologique 56 (Paris, 1961), 532.

contemplatio stuporis or ἔκστασις[55] that accompanies the exegete's penetration of—and by!—the meaning of the text.[56] Indeed, P. Miller makes a convincing case that Origen himself finds in the Song a demonstration that texts themselves can be made divine beauties for the godly *erastês*: 'the profound dwelling' of the soul in 'the textual reality of scriptural language' becomes a form of erotic union in bliss.[57]

Thus while the passage quoted above does not exhibit the sort of apophatic or affective mysticism of ecstasy that W. Völker attributes to Origen,[58] there is no doubt that his language is richly affective. Origen 'suffers' the Bridegroom's tantalizing peregrinations. He senses 'intensely' the Bridegroom's presence and 'longs' for him in his absence, just as does the Bride in her own ways and seasons. And all the while it is the Song itself that has drawn out of Origen such attestation of feeling. That is to say, the Song has not been subjected to some 'erotic' theory of reading devised independently by Origen and then brought to the text. Rather, he has been inwardly wounded by the Song from his youth and has learned from it the need for an erotically charged hermeneutic of which the Song is at once the exemplar and the most fitting subject.

It is a mistake, as P. Hadot has indicated, to read an individualist perspective into every 'I' statement that one encounters in ancient

[55] *Hom. in Num.* 27.12 (*GCS* 30. 275).

[56] See Macleod, 'Allegory and Mysticism', 362–79.

[57] ' "Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure": Erōs and Language in Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*', *JAAR* 54:2 (Summer, 1986), 241–2.

[58] In view of Origen's reference to ἔκστασις in *Hom. in Num.* 27.12 (*GCS* 30. 275), Völker is correct to look for some form of ecstatic mysticism in Origen. We might also make note of other motifs common to 'mystical' literatures—a divine 'enthusiasm' and intoxication (*Princ.* 4.1.6 (*SC* 268. 262); *Cant.* 3.6.5 (*SC* 376. 542); *Jo.* 1.205–8 (*SC* 120bis.160–2)), of a 'face to face' vision of God (*Princ.* 1.1.2 (*SC* 252. 92–4); *Hom. in Num.* 27.12 (*GCS* 30. 273)) and spiritual union (*Cant.* 1.1.5 (*SC* 375.178–80) and *pass.*; *Hom. in Gen.* 10.5 (*SC* 7bis. 270–2); *Jo.* 19.21–5 (*SC* 290. 58–60))—all of which Christians may experience in reading the Scriptures. But Völker errs in linking Origen's ecstasis too closely with those wholly affective mysticisms which seek to stage a *sortie de soi* that positions one outside the intellect. For Origen, *ecstasis* is not an experience in which the soul stands outside the intellect but rather one in which the intellect steps outside the inadequate conceptions in which it has been confined. *Ecstasis* is not less rational but more rational than what we know as reason, and proves its catholicity by embracing the whole range of human feeling and affection.

writings.[59] But Origen is doing something new in his exegesis of the Song—a 'writing large' of the novelty intrinsic to his entire exegetical project as a whole. This project, so K. Torjesen has demonstrated conclusively, rests upon a set of procedures precisely designed to call forth a contemporary personal encounter with the divine Logos through the mediation of the text.[60] The Song, we shall see, becomes to Origen the most intense imaginable actualization of the experience of the text as a mode of meeting the Word, indeed, of uniting with him and so of reproducing his likeness in the soul.

Hence, inasmuch as Origen understands participation in the Bridegroom's nuptial life, via the Song, to foster in him the likeness of the Bridegroom's nuptial being, he will come to see his own exegesis itself to be a prolongation of the Bridegroom's loving, efficacious speech. For example, he prays in Book 2 of the *Commentary* for inspiration sufficient to reproduce the Bridegroom's *elocutiones* in his own *eloquia*, so that he might be '. . . enlightened not only for the understanding of these things (i.e. as Bride-reader) but also for the propagation of them (i.e. as Bridegroom-teacher) . . . according to the capacity of those who are to be our readers'.[61] An even more striking instance of Origen's self-conception as a 'participated Bridegroom' appears in *Homily 2*, where he discusses the Bridegroom's 'lovely dart' of love:

How blessed it is to be wounded by this dart! Those men who talked together, saying to each other, "Was not our heart burning within us in the way, whilst He opened to us the Scriptures?", had been wounded by this dart. If anyone is wounded by our discourse, if any is wounded by the teaching of the Divine Scripture, and can say, "I have been wounded by love," perhaps he follows both the former and the latter. But why do I say perhaps? I offer a clear explanation.[62]

59 This kind of anachronism lies, for example, behind those greatly inadequate modern psychological readings of Marcus Aurelius, which consequently fail to see the almost formulaic Stoic rigour of style in the *Meditations*. See P. Hadot, *La Citadelle intérieure: introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle* (Paris, 1992), 261–2, 268, 275–314.

60 *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*, Patristische Texte und Studien 28 (Berlin, 1986), 108–47.

61 *Cant.* 2.8.13 (*SC* 375. 414). See also *Hom. in Cant.* 2.11 (*SC* 37bis. 138–40): 'Which of us, do you think, is competent to explain the full meaning of this passage and this mystery as it deserves to be explained? Let us pray God to grant us grace to open the Scriptures and enable us to say how Jesus opened the Scriptures to us!.'

62 *Hom. in Cant.* 2.8 (*SC* 37bis. 132–4).

This particular aspect of Origen's reading of the Song appears to have made the strongest impression on his work as a teacher of Christian philosophy and theology. The depth of this impression can be appreciated in particular by reference to the *Address of Thanks*[63] written in Origen's honour by his student Gregory of Neo-Caesarea (*c.*213–70), also known as Thaumaturgos ('the Wonder-worker'), who had resided in Origen's household for the five years from 233 to 238.[64] Gregory characterizes his text as a *λόγος χαριστήριος*,[65] closely following the generic contours of panegyric. A cursory reading of Gregory's text reveals, as we might expect, a disciple's intimacy with his master's theological universe; and so Gregory makes not only reference to but constant use of themes and images that are distinctively those of Origen: the spiritual—even nuptial—care of the guardian angel, the spiritual nourishment to be had from divine teaching, the intellectual Paradise, the Logos as teacher, the wound of love, the fire of spiritual desire.

Of special relevance to this study are three passages taken from the sixth chapter of the *Address of Thanks* in which Gregory employs two theological images—love's fire and love's wound—that also appear prominently in the Prologue to Origen's *Commentary on the Song*:

(1) I cannot now tell how many sayings of this sort he was wont to utter forth, urging us to philosophise, and not one day only; but all those early days when we first resorted to him transfixed by his word as by an arrow (*βεβλημένοι μὲν ὥσπερ τινὶ βέλει τῷ παρ' αὐτοῦ λόγῳ*), and in our new youth (for he was compounded of a certain sweet grace and persuasiveness and a certain cogency), while we were still casting about and considering and essaying to philosophise, but not yet fully decided, yet withal somehow unable to draw back, and attracted to him by some constraining power greater than his words (*ἀφίστασ θαῖ δὲ πάλιν οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως οὐ δυνάμενοι, ἀεὶ δὲ ὥσπερ ὑπό τισιν ἀνάγκαις μείζοσι τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἑλκόμενοι*).[66]

[63] *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène à Grégoire*, ed. and tr. H. Crouzel, *SC* 148 (Paris, 1969).

[64] For the career of Gregory, particularly in relation to Origen, see A. Brinkmann, 'Gregors des Thaumaturgen Panegyricus auf Origenes', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, NS 56 (Frankfurt, 1901), 55–76; Crouzel, introduction to *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène à Grégoire* (*SC* 148. 11–92); P. Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des IIe et IIIe siècles,* Patristica 2 (Paris, 1961).

[65] *Pan. Or.* 3.31 (*SC* 148. 108).

[66] *Pan. Or.* 6.78 (*SC* 148. 126), tr. W. Metcalfe, 58–9.

(2) Deeply stricken by it (i. e., *erôs*) (*ᾧ μάλιστα τετρωμένος*), I was led to neglect all that seemed to concern me: affairs, studies, even my favourite law, home and kindred there, no less than those among whom I was sojourning. One thing only was dear and affected me: philosophy and its teacher, this divine man (*οὗτος ὁ θεῖος ἄνθρωπος*)—and the soul of Jonathan was knit with David.[67]

(3) Like some spark kindled within my soul there was kindled and blazed forth my love both towards Him, most desirable of all for His beauty unspeakable, the Word holy and altogether lovely, and toward this man his friend and prophet.[68]

The divinizing, wounding, inflaming power of the divine Logos occupies the theological centre of Gregory's texts (see especially 3 above). Yet, it is Origen himself—the 'divine man', the 'friend and prophet' of the Logos—who holds our attention, not as one standing over and against the Logos but as one abiding in and with the Logos. We can therefore see how deeply Gregory himself has been persuaded by Origen's own nuptial and erotic understanding of his pedagogical activity; he is 'attracted to [Origen]' by an ineffable force and his soul is knit together—might we even say as 'one spirit'?—in an inward, nuptial bond with the person of the teacher, as Jonathan was to David.[69]

[67] *Pan. Or.* 6.84–5 (*SC* 148. 128–30), tr. W. Metcalfe, 60.

[68] *Οἷος οὖν τις σπινθήρ ἐνσκήψας μέσῃ τῇ ψυχῇ ἡμῶν, ἀνήπτετό τε καὶ ἐξεκαίετο ὅ τε πρὸς τὸν ἁπάντων ὑπὸ κάλλους ἀρρήτου ἐπακτικώτατον αὐτὸν λόγον τὸν ἱερὸν τὸν ἐρασμιώτατον, καὶ ὁ πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδε τὸν αὐτοῦ φίλον καὶ προήγορον ἔρως*, *Pan. Or.* 6. 83 (*SC* 148. 128), tr. W. Metcalfe, 60.

[69] R. Valantasis seeks to decipher a sexual code-language in Gregory's description of his relationship to the teacher: 'So much of Gregory Thaumaturgos's description of the teacher–student interaction revolves about suggestions of sexual relations that clearly the sexual dynamic exceeds the Platonic model of education in the *Symposium*. Gregory shows no evidence of abstracting from physical relationships to noetic, because his language consistently betrays the physical aspect ... (and) never moves from that attraction'; see *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century: A Semiotic Study of the Guide–Disciple Relationship in Christianity, Neoplatonism, Hermetism and Gnosticism*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 27 (Minneapolis, 1991), 27. Valantasis refers not to a physically sexual bond between Gregory and Origen but rather a pedagogical bond that is structured strongly on analogy to the sexual. This, I think, is correct, if the sexual encoding is constrained within the limits of the greater nuptial motif that is the theological rationale for their relationship; if Gregory 'never moves from that attraction' to Origen the man, it is because (1) his work is panegyric, and (2) Origen is precisely that 'divine man' *in whom* the Logos-Bridegroom is most immediately encountered. Valantasis gives only cursory attention to the christological centre of Gregory's work.

Significantly, all of these themes ('personalism', union with the Logos, the dart and wound of love, spiritual fireiness) are central to Origen's exposition of the Song and, indeed, coalesce in the *Commentary* in much the same configuration that they have in Gregory's panegyric. In the Prologue to the *Commentary*, for example, we read the following:

And the soul is moved by heavenly love and longing when, having clearly beheld the beauty and fairness of the Word of God, it falls deeply in love with His loveliness and receives from the Word Himself a certain dart and wound of love . . . If, then, a man can so extend his thinking as to ponder and consider the beauty and grace of all the things that have been created in the Word, the very charm of them will so smite him, the grandeur of their brightness will so pierce him as with a *chosen dart*—as says the prophet—that he will suffer from the dart Himself a saving wound, and will be kindled with the blessed fire of his love.[70]

The similarities between this text and Gregory's words (all of which come from the same chapter of the *Address of Thanks*) are obvious and striking.

This constellation of ideas, derived from the Song and probably expressed in almost this exact form, must already have been integral to Origen's course of private instruction. Hence, even if his first public treatments of the Song (excluding the early *Commentary*) came only in the years following 240, the evidence of Gregory suggests that the central lines of his exegesis had taken shape much earlier, such that the doctrine of the Song had already entered his pedagogical canons. This is surely strong evidence that the Song had long been one of Origen's chief inspirations, its doctrine perhaps long held by him as arcana reserved in some sense for the mature, among whom Gregory certainly numbered.

The 'personalism' that we have been discussing holds a further importance in Origen's reading of the Song. All of the special themes incorporated by the *Commentary* take on their special meaning in and through the joy, delight, and bliss arising between the heavenly couple as they advance towards consummation. He writes:

70 *Cant.* prol. 2.17 (*SC* 375. 102–4).

The Scripture before us, therefore, speaks of this love with which the blessed soul is kindled and inflamed towards the Word of God; it sings by the Spirit the song of the marriage whereby the Church is joined and allied to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom ...[71]

Origen senses the very language of the Song to be caught up—set afire, as it were—in the spiritual ascent marked by the Bridegroom's and Bride's conversation. This point is of the greatest importance to understanding how he thinks the persons and action of the Song to be constituted—that is, entirely as 'speakers' and their speech-acts. The well-known fact that Origen excludes any physical or historical meanings from the Song—reading it as one of his perplexing 'bodiless' texts, of which we shall have more to say in Chapter 1—simply bears out his conviction that the whole Song, even its words, has been transposed to a higher register of being where every movement is performed *con fuoco*.

All these features of Origen's *Commentary* and *Homilies* merit remark. Not only do they generally describe the programme that he follows in his exposition of the Song; they also signal something of the innovative and creative character of his exegesis. And even if none of these features when taken by itself can be said to be absolutely original to Origen, the vigour and comprehensiveness with which he pursues their implications and the extent to which he seamlessly interweaves them is nothing if not utterly distinctive.

Yet, it is precisely the extraordinariness of such features, alongside their determinative character for the later tradition, that has tended to inhibit a more complete assessment of Origen's interpretation of the Song. It has, in fact, distracted from the otherwise quite obvious question of why the Song should be for Origen such an unparalleled centre of synthesis and innovation. As a consequence, past scholarship has allowed the details and characteristics of his verse-by-verse reading of the Song's dramatic narrative to eclipse his judgements concerning the text taken as a unity of presentation—as a single *logos* from a single intellectual source (i.e. Solomon). The scope of Origen's conception of the Song itself has scarcely been noticed, much less given either the attention or the hermeneutical significance that it demands. We shall now turn to consider, in a preliminary way, the

[71] *Cant.* prol. 2.16 (*SC* 375. 122–4).

ultimacy that Origen attaches to the text of the Song, in view of what he describes as its 'perfection'.

ORIGEN ON THE PERFECTION OF THE SONG OF SONGS

The scope of the Song of Songs' perfection

When reading Origen's *Commentary on the Song*, we should be struck by how insistently he directs our attention to the splendour and centrality of the Song itself. Origen shows scarcely any reserve in voicing the highest judgements of the Song's theological and spiritual value. Indeed, when speaking of this 'little book', the Prologue of the great *Commentary* seems to press the vocabulary of excellence to its very limits. In one especially valuable passage, we find Origen speaking of the Song in a remarkably elevated tone, and the terms of his definition are correspondingly high:

All those, then, that were uttered by them, were the introductory songs sung by the Bridegroom's friends; but this song is the very one that the Bridegroom Himself was to sing as His marriage-hymn, when about to take his Bride; in which same song the Bride no longer wants the Bridegroom's friends to sing to her, but longs to hear her Spouse who now is with her, speak with His own lips; wherefore she says: 'Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.' Rightly, then, is this song preferred before all songs. The other songs that the Law and the prophets sang, were sung to the Bride while she was still a little child and had not yet attained maturity. But this song is sung to her now that she is grown up, and very strong, and ready for a husband's power and the perfect mystery. It is said of her for this reason: 'My perfect dove is one.' As the perfect Bride of the perfect Husband, then, she has received the words of perfect doctrine.[72]

[72] 'Illa ergo omnia quae per illos adnuntiabantur cantica erant per amicos sponsi praecedentia; istud vero unum canticum est, quod ipsi iam sponso sponsam suam suscepturo epithalamii specie erat canendum, in quo sponsa non adhuc per amicos sponsi cantari sibi vult, sed ipsius iam sponsi praesentis audire verba desiderat dicens: "Osculetur me ab osculis oris sui". Unde et omnibus canticis merito praefertur; videntur enim cetera cantica, quae lex et prophetae cecinerunt, parvulae adhuc sponsae et quae nondum vestibula maturae aetatis ingressa sit decantata, hoc vero canticum adultae iam et valde robustae et quae capax iam sit virilis potentiae

These sentences should be read with great seriousness. Origen's modern reader could easily be tempted to soften them before their full force can be felt. The fluency, literary craft, and exuberance so evident here might leave some readers with the impression that Origen is only speaking hyperbolically. Likewise, the dense figuration of Origen's words leaves them open to being read merely as metaphorical expressions. What appear to be statements of the text's real identity would then be taken only as indications of the Song's function as an analogue of higher realities. In either case, the modern reader's tendency will very likely be to glide past these statements and others like them as so much exultation, certainly not as precise judgements of the text itself.

However one might ultimately interpret these sentences, one thing is certain. They take the literal form of positive declarations of the Song's unique identity and incomparable worth. Indeed, read at face value, this whole passage adds up to a definitive statement of the superlative value of this unique book, a value determined in the first instance by what the Song is and who sings it. In short, Origen has set out to give a multifaceted portrayal of the Song's perfection.

Does Origen mean what he says, exactly as he says it? Given what we have noted so far of his extraordinary appraisal of the Song, we already have some reason to think that he does. And without a compelling reason to doubt that Origen has expressed himself candidly, we ought at least to entertain the question of what a straightforward reading of this passage would say about the nature of the Song's perfection.

Writing with great succinctness in this passage, then, Origen has ascribed a remarkably diverse range of perfections to the Song—in each of its aspects as well as its whole. Its story, its characters, its teaching, and its innermost potency of meaning—all of these are perfect features of the text:

(1) *The Song imparts the 'perfect doctrine'* ('doctrina perfecta'). As the superlative spiritual pedagogy, the Song conveys its teaching in the way that

perfectique mysterii decantari. Secundum quod dicitur de ipsa quia una sit perfecta columba. Quasi perfecta ergo perfecti viri sponsa perfectae suscepit verba doctrinae', *Cant.* prol. 4.3–4 (*SC* 375. 148); Lawson, 46 (emended). We shall refer to this passage later in the study.

Origen thinks the most excellent—as Christ's very own, living act of teaching.[73]

(2) *The Song is addressed to the 'perfect Bride'* ('perfecta sponsa') *by the 'perfect Husband'* ('perfectus vir'). The Bride, to whom Christ addresses Song, has 'attained maturity', is 'grown up and very strong'; she is the 'perfect dove', possessing unity of spirit ('one'), and the 'perfect Bride'.

(3) *The Song communicates the 'perfect mystery'* ('perfectum mysterium'). In Origen's writings *mysterium* (μυστήριον), Crouzel explains, 'désigne la réalité spirituelle au delà des apparences sensibles' and is equivalent to truth (ἀλήθεια) as well as the deepest spiritual meaning of Scripture.[74] Yet it also denotes the 'great mystery' of Eph. 5: 32 (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν), and is thus tied to the nuptial union of Christ and the Church.[75] The 'perfect mystery', then, must designate the superlative formulation of this μυστήριον as both the supreme nuptial mystery and the deepest *alêtheia*—the 'spirit'—of Scripture.

Taken together, these points define the contours of the Song and give an impression of the strength and uniqueness of Origen's claims for it. They also summarize much else of his further, more detailed assessment of the Song, its identity and its character. Above all, what Origen would have the reader see is that the supremely spiritual character of the Song is most intensely manifest in its various perfections.

The Song of Songs as perfect text

This being said, Origen does not let his interpretative gaze rest finally in the perfection of any single feature of the Song. Time and again in the Prologue, he tells us in the plainest language that perfection belongs to the text of the Song and not merely to its theme, its teaching, or the story that it tells. The Song, he tells us, is that text

[73] See *Jo.* 1.3 (*SC* 120bis. 62–6) on the excellence of Christ's personal teaching.

[74] H. Crouzel, *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'*, Museum Lessianum, section théologique 56 (Paris, 1961), 25–31, for Crouzel's discussion of the term μυστήριον in Origen. See also A.-M. Pelletier, *Lectures du Cantiques des Cantiques*, 246–52.

[75] For references to Eph. 5: 32, see *Cant.* 2.8.5 (*SC* 375. 408–10); *Comm. in Mt.* 14.16–17 (*GCS* 40. 323–6); *Jo.* 19.23 (*SC* 290. 58).

'where now perfection is shown forth' (*ubi iam perfectio ostenditur*).[76] It is 'that perfect and mystical song' (*istud perfectum quia mysticum canticum*).[77] The Song is 'rightly to be preferred before all songs' (*unde et omnibus canticis merito praefertur*...).[78] The text, not the subject-matter, of the Song is the object of these affirmations.

Similarly, Origen does not speak simply of a 'perfect doctrine' in the Song but rather of the 'words of perfect doctrine' (*perfectae suscepit verba doctrinae*).[79] He will not, in other words, distinguish the 'perfect doctrine' from the *λόγοι* or *verba* in which it is couched, and these 'words' are precisely those comprised by the Song. Or again, Origen specifically identifies 'this song' (*hoc vero canticum*) as the one sung to the Bride when she is 'ready for...the perfect mystery'.[80] The demonstrative pronoun ('this') gestures directly to the text as the locus of this 'perfect mystery'.

Any doubts that in these expressions Origen is pointing to the text and not merely to its spiritual interpretation are answered at the end of the Prologue: 'But now his saying *that is Solomon's* shows that this song, which we have in hand and which he was about to sing, is Solomon's, and for that reason has the title that he gave to it.'[81] The focus of Origen's interest is 'this song' (*istud Canticum*), which originates in 'Solomon's' dual activity as both the prophet who writes and the Bridegroom who sings. In other words, Origen speaks here of the Song as both an historical and a theological reality, and both of these converge in the text 'which we have in hand' (*quod est in manibus*). Thus when he so forcefully declares in our touchstone passage above that 'this song is the very one (*istud vero unum canticum est*) that the Bridegroom himself was to sing as His marriage-hymn', we see that he means something simple yet awesome in its implications: *the Song of Songs is truly identical with the perfect marriage-hymn that belongs to the Bridegroom alone.*[82]

[76] *Cant.* prol. 4.28 (SC 375. 167). J. Chênevert aptly translates this as 'le tableau de perfection'.

[77] *Cant.* prol. 4.5 (SC 375. 148–50).

[78] *Cant.* prol. 4.4 (*SC* 375. 148).

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] *Cant.* prol. 4.35 (*SC* 375. 172).

[82] Lawson translates *vero unum canticum* as 'unique song' (p. 46), an inexact expression that communicates neither the vigorous precision of Origen's words nor their clear orientation to the very text of the Song.

In setting out his vision of the Song, Origen has raised the hermeneutical stakes higher than for any other biblical book. In no other commentary or homily will one find that he has praised a Scripture so highly or so precisely measured his praise in light of an explicit metaphysical definition of the text itself. Nowhere else does Origen make any other single Scripture carry such an immense charge of spiritual presence, flowing inward and downward from the Song's outermost limit, its metaphysical 'first principle' in the unifying *logos* of the text. In respect of its very special way of being and possessing its *logos*, the Song is a text without peer in the whole canon of Scripture and indeed in the whole history of human literature, sacred and profane. Even the gospels, the 'first-fruits of all the Scriptures' (ἀπαρχὴ πάσης γραφῆς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον),[83] fail to move Origen to make affirmations of such an absolute character as he does in connection with the Song.

Origen's lush portrayal of the Song's formal perfection cannot be idle. His depiction is far too detailed, his language too capacious and intense, for us to conclude that this textual perfection is peripheral to the theological concerns that dominate his exegesis of the Song as a whole. The perfection of the Song, as understood by Origen, demands a theological interpretation—one that, by giving us access to the Song's deepest identity as perfect text, finally has a hermeneutical application.

Where Origen most obviously develops a specifically hermeneutical implication from the excellence and perfection of the Song is in his attribution of a 'bodiless' or nonliteral character to the text. A comparison of the following two passages from the Prologue will show how closely he aligns his understanding of the Song's perfection and its 'bodilessness' as correlative notions that underlie the whole Song:

(1) ...in the Song of Songs, where now perfection is shown forth (*in Cantico Canticorum, ubi iam perfectio ostenditur*), he [i.e. Solomon] describes himself neither as the son of David, nor as king;[84]

(2) So the Song of Songs is simply Solomon's; it belongs neither to the Son of David, nor to Israel's king, and there is absolutely no indication of a

[83] *Jo.* 1.20 (*SC* 120$^{\text{bis.}}$ 66) and *pass.*
[84] *Cant.* prol. 4.28 (*SC* 375. 166).

carnal denomination in it (. . . *neque aliqua prosus in his miscetur carnalis nominis intelligentia*).[85]

We should note moreover that by 'carnal' (*carnalis*) in 2 above, Origen means not only bodily sensuousness (which his reading of the Song certainly excludes) but more centrally what, a few lines earlier in much the same context, he has called 'corporeal connotation' or 'bodily understanding': 'neither "Son of David" nor "king" nor any other term patient of a bodily understanding (. . . *neque aliud horum quod ad corporeum pertinere possit intellectum* . . .)'.[86] It is 'terms'—words and expressions—and not merely themes, to which Origen denies a 'carnal' or 'corporeal' aspect. The 'bodilessness' of the Song, and likewise its perfection, saturate the verbal foundations of the text. The Song is formally perfect and 'bodiless'.

Therefore, a careful reading of the *Commentary* and *Homilies* against the background of Origen's affirmations of its intrinsic perfection and 'bodilessness' demands a radical change of focus from nuptial *motif* to nuptial *text*. Having begun with investigating Origen's uses of nuptial imagery in expositing the Song, we have found it necessary to turn instead to consider his theological use of the Song itself—the formal, textual unity—as a nuptial image or, closer to Origen, as the supreme nuptial reality in scriptural form. In this regard, then, we should mention two notions central to this study's argument as it will actually take shape:

(1) Origen is more interested in the spiritual—and spiritually nuptial—form and function of Song as text than he is even in the theological value of the nuptial images that comprise it.

(2) Origen reads the Song as the real presence, under the intelligible aspect of a text, of the very nuptial mystery that it also hymns (as marriage-song) and enacts (as drama).

If Origen's readers wish really to hear and appreciate the Song as Origen does, if they want to understand with what complete theological realism Origen envisions the Bridegroom's nuptial mystery to be immanent in the Song, they must first ask, 'What does Origen understand the Song itself to be?'

[85] *Cant.* prol. 4.21 (*SC* 375. 122); Lawson, 53 (emended).
[86] *Cant.* prol. 4.21 (*SC* 375. 160); Lawson, 52 (emended).

Our aim in this study will be to show that the only answer that takes into account all of Origen's affirmations of the Song is also the most radical one conceivable: *Origen understands the Song of Songs to be the eschatological 'spirit' of Scripture made wholly manifest in textual form.* This statement should be taken in the strictest sense possible. In the Song, Origen finds himself standing, however unworthily, in the midst of the eschatological 'perfect mystery' plainly revealed; and so to the text itself he attributes a maximal and real presence of all that characterizes the 'spirit' of Scripture—perfection, pedagogical finality, eschatological fullness, and the unobstructed vision of the Logos.

To grasp the full significance of this claim, of course, demands a quite complete grasp of the role that the 'spirit' (*pneuma*) plays in Origen's hermeneutic. For, as we shall later show from relevant texts, Origen understands by the 'spirit' of Scripture much more than simply those hidden propositional doctrines that allegory yields. It is, more fundamentally, the intellectual Being in whom such doctrines subsist from the beginning. Briefly put, the 'spirit' of Scripture is the divine Logos himself present as the teacher, the object, the form, the substance and, ultimately, the subject of all true understandings of the inspired text.

To read the Song as the manifest 'spirit' of Scripture, therefore, is finally to *hear* it as the Bridegroom's Word alone, to *behold* it as the Logos himself. Only a system of superlatives, therefore, can do justice to Origen's conception of the Song. Earlier discussion has already shown that Origen himself sets forth many such superlatives in the clear language of the Prologue. To others he makes the plainest allusion, if one only reads carefully and with an ear for the right harmonies with the whole of Origen's thought.

Accordingly, Origen explains, the Song itself is the 'perfect song', the 'perfect mystery', and 'the husband's power'. In its unity of presentation as Christ's 'marriage-song'—the 'very one which the Bridegroom was to sing when he came to claim his Bride'—the Song is seen to convey the Logos' spiritual (i.e. intelligible) advent. To read the Song fully is to see not only that it has *logos* but that it is *Logos* as such—the realized presence of God's eschatological 'All in all'. In short, what Origen's suitably disposed reader hears in the Song is the Logos-Bridegroom's eschatological speech, which creates and salvifically recreates all rational beings in divine Love.

PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON THE PERFECTION OF THE SONG OF SONGS IN ORIGEN'S EXEGESIS

Precisely to the extent that Origen would merge the intelligible form of this *book*—the Song, heard as the Bridegroom's marriage-song—with the *theological end of history*, a certain stream of contemporary scholarship will distance itself from him.[87] This stream is represented by those who, like J. D. Zizioulas, criticize Origen for a 'synthesis' that not only privileges the 'truth of revelation' over the 'truth of history' but wholly subsumes the latter in the former. Zizioulas writes:

> The idea of *revelation* seems to lie at the very heart of the problem, since revelation always unifies existence, through an idea or a meaning that is singular and comprehensive, forming a connection between created and uncreated rationality. One of the criticisms which modern theology can make of Origen is that if he undermined the historical Christ, it is because he was preoccupied above all with revelation. It is an essential point, and the criticism is fully justified, because there appears to be an intrinsic contradiction between revelation and history... If an interest in truth as revelation eclipses an interest in truth as history, it inevitably results in the human mind becoming the ground of truth, the crucial bond between truth and creation.[88]

This critique of Origen's reading of the Song belongs to a much larger negative judgement of his alleged diminishment of 'history' as the primary matrix of divine action and revelation. R. P. C. Hanson, for example, characterizes Origen's writing on the Song as riddled with a 'Philonic' anti-historical bias:

> Both Hippolytus and Origen interpreted the Song of Solomon in a way distinctly reminiscent of Philonic exegesis... I have deliberately labelled this type of exegesis as Philonic, because it seems to me that it involves exactly the same mode of allegory as does Philo's psychological allegory or allegory into philosophical speculation. In it the correspondence between event and event is forgotten and a biblical incident is dissolved into a timeless analysis of good and evil impulses warring within the Christian's soul.[89]

[87] See Hanson, *Allegory and Event A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Richmond, 1959), 259–88; Daniélou, *Origène*, 175–98; J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY, 1985), 75–8.

[88] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 77–8.

[89] *Allegory and Event*, 251–2.

Origen's de-corporealizing of the Song appears here merely as the nadir of his refusal to take any historical realities—which must include bodies—with deep seriousness. Again, Hanson writes:

> The critical subject upon which Origen never accepted the biblical viewpoint was the significance of history. To the writers of the Bible history is *par excellence* the field of God's revelation of himself... To this insight he is virtually blind. He does not, as he has been represented to do by some scholars, reject or abandon history... But he perilously reduces the significance of history and with history of sacraments and of eschatology. In his view history, if it is to have any significance at all, can be no more than an acted parable, a charade for showing forth eternal truths about God; it is not, as in the prophets, the place where through tension and uncertainty and danger and faith men encounter God as active towards them.[90]

Hanson's critique is not without value. It must surely invite the reader—if only for the sake of justice and clarity—to examine with deepened seriousness the constellation formed by Origen's concepts of history, the 'last things', the revelation of the Logos, and the inspired text of the Song.

Yet we shall find as our discussion progresses that Origen's exegesis of the Song is far from anti-historical. In the first place, he discerns in the dramatic rhythms of the Song the underlying pattern of movements whereby the Bride, as God's elect living within the limits of history, may progress to her future life through a moral and intellectual struggle that is deeply and intrinsically free.[91] More than this, however, Origen seeks the Bridegroom's eschatological presence at the profound origins of the Song by means of a hermeneutic that looks first to the real historical situation of the biblical book. For, as we shall find in Chapters 4 and 5, the structure of Origen's exegesis proves that to discern the Song's eschatological character one must begin by delineating the contours of the prophet Solomon's own historically conditioned experience. In the unique instance of the Song, Origen thinks, the reader will find that it is no longer possible to contain the text or the prophet within the limits of history. Yet the exegetical procedure itself assumes the normative integrity of any

[90] *Allegory and Event*, 363–4.

[91] See R. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford, 1993), 58–69.

inspired text's historical origins and finds that integrity fulfilled—not negated—in the perfection and finality of the Song.

It is perhaps to defend Origen from critics such as Hanson that certain sympathetic scholars minimize the importance in Origen's hermeneutic of a fully realized eschatology of the text. Crouzel, for example, knows that Origen envisions a 'real presence' of the eschatological mystery in the 'spirit' of Scripture: '...il n'y a en réalité qu'un seul évangile, nous sommes déjà en possession des biens suprêmes...Les nouvelles Écritures réalisent déjà ce qu'elles prophétisent.'[92] Crouzel, moreover, writes critically of those who attack Origen's allegorism on the grounds that his hermeneutic nullifies the value of historical being:

> Ce verdict vient d'une conception du temps chrétien trop étroite, le réduisant à la seul ligne horizontale, alors que la verticale est l'expression du sacramentalisme, de la présence anticipée des biens eschatologiques dans l'Evangile temporal.[93]

Yet Crouzel does not deduce from the 'sacramentalism' of prophecy itself that Origen will seek the depths of 'spirit' not only in the narratives or teachings of Scripture but also, and more fundamentally, in the prophetic events behind the scriptural books themselves. With Crouzel the eschatological verities remain always hidden within and behind the 'letter' of any biblical text. They are not immediately available in and as the text's explicit form but always lie at the end of the interpreter's anagogical 'mouvement verticale'.

Thus when Crouzel turns to Origen's *Commentary*, he is scarcely prepared to see that Origen has made the Song bear an intensity of eschatological presence that surpasses that of any other Scripture. Certainly, Crouzel recognizes that Origen treats the Song as the preeminent locus for expounding the nuptial motif, which indeed holds a privileged place in his mystical theology and even has a strongly eschatological bearing.[94] Nevertheless, in his own edition of the *Commentary*, Crouzel entirely neglects to investigate Origen's programmatic development of a total vision of the Song itself, its

[92] *Origène*, 110.
[93] Ibid. 116.
[94] 'La thème du mariage mystique chez Origène et ses sources', *Studia Missionalia*, 26 (1977), 47–57; *Origène*, 166–71.

perfection, its finality, and 'Solomon's' relation to the whole. Instead, Crouzel concentrates entirely upon developing a wide-ranging survey of themes typical of Origen's verse-by-verse exegesis.[95] However helpful this survey may be, it fails even to take notice of Origen's profound concern for the text *qua* text and so is not adequate to lead us to appreciate his teleological conception of the Song as a whole.

The same deficiencies appear even more plainly in J. Chênevert, whose *L'Église dans le Commentaire d'Origène sur le Cantique des Cantiques* stands as the only book-length study of Origen's Song exegesis.[96] Like shorter studies of the *Commentary on the Song*, Chênevert's discussion takes almost no interest in how Origen assesses the Song itself, as a whole text. Rather, Chênevert uses the *Commentary* as the definitive source for a comprehensive picture of Origen's ecclesiology, as indeed it is.

Curiously, Chênevert does take notice of the 'excellence du Cantique' in Origen's exegesis and even catalogues a number of texts attesting to the Song's perfection.[97] Yet, Chênevert makes nothing of this 'excellence', save that he understands Origen to indicate by it the 'contrôles sévères' to which the reader must submit the exegesis of the Song.[98] Indeed, Chênevert specifically denies the validity of a reading that would set Solomon and the actual text of the Song itself in an 'eschatological' and therefore 'incorporeal' context:

> Origène ne dit pas que le *Cantique* décrive cet état, qu'il ait pour objet les réalités eschatologiques pleinement réalisées . . . La relation entre le *Cantique* et l'eschatologie consiste, donc, pour Origène, en ce que le *Cantique* a pour objet de décrire, dans ce qu'elle a de caractérisquement eschatologique, cette tension actuelle de l'épouse vers le terme final de son union parfaite avec le Christ.[99]

Chênevert is, of course, considering the Song only as a dramatic narrative, and at this register he is certainly correct to stress 'tension' over 'union parfaite'. But this tension between the 'now' and the 'not

[95] See introduction to *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (*SC* 375. 9–71) and complementary notes (*SC* 376. 751–84).

[96] *L'Église dans le Commentaire d'Origène sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, Studia 24 (Paris, 1969).

[97] Ibid. 234–6.

[98] Ibid. 235.

[99] Ibid. 251–2

yet is, for Origen, not merely a subject for dramatic representation; it is concretely experienced in the spiritual effort required of the reader to shift his gaze from the Song's narrative level to its eschatological unity in the unique speech-act of the Bridegroom-Logos. At this eschatological level, which comprehends and creates the very perfection of the text, this tension is already fully resolved, so that its object is indeed 'les réalités eschatologiques pleinement réalisées'. Only our own deficiency of conception—our inability to receive the fecundating plenitude of the Bridegroom's epithalamium—obstructs our openness to its reality.

As we saw with Crouzel above, Origen's development of what might be called an 'eschatological register' in biblical books (read as singular 'wholes') is occasionally recognized. Yet few scholars fully appreciate the importance of the principle to his exegesis as a whole. Nor are its implications for Origen's reading of the Song adequately delineated anywhere. For her part, K. Torjesen does discuss at some length the fact that Origen invests the historical moment of every biblical book's disclosure with a spiritual sense.[100] But her observation remains largely theoretical. She draws from it no conclusions relevant to the exegesis of books-as-unities, rather than simply as vehicles for spiritually meaningful narratives.

Consequently, Torjesen does not, as she ought, see that Origen regards every book of Scripture as a single spiritual reality, an intelligible *λόγος* subsisting in a rational being (*λογικός*). Nor does she observe that Origen treats each book as part of a deeply ramified curriculum circumscribed by the limits of the canon as a whole, so that interpreting the prophetic locus of each book is essential to understanding its precise way of in-forming (in both senses) the reader.

Torjesen does, correctly, recognize that an important phase of Origen's exegesis involves placing the reader as a spiritual participant in the living action of the text. But, although she acknowledges prophecy to be for Origen an event of participative encounter between prophet and Logos, she does not understand that above all other stages in the exegetical process, Origen elevates that moment when the reader comes to share noetically in the prophet's own

[100] See Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 112.

unitive experience in authoring the inspired book. To understand this fact is critical, since to Origen's mind the prophet's experience as instrumental cause of the book is ultimately the book's most fundamental reality; and it actively embraces the totality of the book's mysteries.

Consequently, Torjesen remains vague about Origen's important distinction between 'the history which is reported in the text' and 'the historical situation out of which the writers of both Old and New Testament wrote'.[101] This leads to methodological problems for Torjesen's study, inasmuch as the only 'history' in Scripture that she notices Origen to allegorize is history at the narrative level, recorded within the sacred texts.[102] In failing fully to explore the implications of Origen's readings of texts at the register on which they are revealed and written as whole books, Torjesen restricts her ability to fine-tune her study of Origen's Song exegesis. Although her analysis is very useful at its own level, it nevertheless fails to shed light on Origen's spiritual reading of the Song as the divine Bridegroom's own true marriage-song. That is, Torjesen never gives 'Solomon's' function as the Song's unique singer the complete spiritual/allegorical value that Origen invests in it.

Thus, when Torjesen examines Origen's exposition of the Song, she looks only at his verse-by-verse exegesis of the Bride/Bridegroom *fabula*. In the course of her analysis, she is concerned only with illuminating two issues: (1) the way that Origen's exegesis moves, rhetorically, to include the reader as a spiritual player of the Bride's dramatic role; and (2) the body of doctrines that Origen develops as the supposed 'content' of the Song's spiritual sense.[103] Her analysis, though not incorrect, is insufficient. For, we shall argue, Origen's ultimate pedagogical aim in the *Commentary* is fully to disclose the ultimately christological mystery of 'Solomon the Peaceable One' as the origin and the finality of the text and, thus, of the Christian's reading of it.

I have already surveyed some of the grounds for my own departure from the main lines of interpretation set down by each of these scholars. Others will emerge as this study progresses, along with further refinements of the contrast between my perspective on

[101] Ibid. 140. [102] Ibid. 85–107. [103] Ibid. 87–96.

Origen's Song exegesis and that of earlier scholarship. Nevertheless, the fundamental point of difference between my own reading and past readings can be briefly summarized. Whereas earlier scholarship follows the judgement of A. Louth, who holds that 'for [Origen] the Song of Songs was *the* book on the summit of the mystical life, the union of the soul with God',[104] I shall argue that Origen approaches the Song of Songs itself, in its manifest intelligibility, as the summit of the mystical life and the supreme textual point of contact and union between the Christian soul and her heavenly Bridegroom.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISCUSSION

This discussion will develop in two stages. The first stage will be dedicated to establishing some of the relevant principles of Origen's hermeneutic and clearing away prior accounts of Origen's Song exegesis that have obscured the actual hermeneutical foundations of the *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song*. In the second stage of this study, we shall turn to the more constructive phase of our project. We shall demonstrate that Origen's actual exegetical procedure in the *Commentary* proves that his spiritual reading of the Song is rooted entirely in certain hermeneutical demands, not in psychological or ascetical compulsions. These hermeneutical demands lead him to make the greatest conceivable claims for the character of the Song—namely, that the Song fully and intelligibly re-presents the eschatological mystery, manifesting the 'spirit' of Scripture in the plain form of a text.

To initiate the first stage of this study, Chapter 1 will examine the status of the literal sense in the *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song*, focusing especially upon Origen's hermeneutic, so as to place the 'bodilessness' of the Song in the context of his whole doctrine of Scripture. We shall find that, for the purposes of our investigation, we must first ask, 'Why does Origen read the Song of Songs as a

[104] *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford, 1981), 54; emphasis in text.

"bodiless" text?' In Chapter 2, our discussion will show that Origen's 'bodiless' reading cannot be explained simply on the grounds of an aversion to or suspicion of embodied nuptial life or sexual love. We shall argue that he not only maintains the goodness of nuptial life in all its aspects—including the erotic, and the sexual—but also sees in it a *typos* of the heavenly nuptial mystery. It will be demonstrated that Origen carries this analogy, and hence a hermeneutical 'body', over into virtually every reading of nuptial, erotic, and sexual episodes in the Scriptures, with the important exception of the Song. Hence, Origen's reading of the Song as a wholly 'bodiless' text must be explained on grounds quite different from those considered by previous scholarship.

The second stage of this study begins with Chapter 3, an investigation of those features of the Song—its structure, figuration, and location in the pedagogical structure of the canon—which will first suggest to Origen that the Song demands a wholly spiritual reading. Ultimately, we will discover that for Origen the Song's spiritual character—its 'bodilessness'—characterizes not only the 'lower' narrative (i.e. 'dramatic') register at which it is usually read but more fundamentally its 'upper' register, where the metaphysical unity of the text coincides with the reality of the inspired prophetic mind, in its own particular degree of unity with the divine Logos himself. Accordingly, Chapters 4 and 5 will argue that in the unique instance of the Song, Origen presses this unity of prophet and divine Logos to its greatest conceivable limit—a complete and real identity-in-union that constitutes the very form of the Song itself. We shall summarize the argument of this section in the Conclusion, which will contend that all the foregoing evidence must lead us to conclude that Origen judges the text of the Song of Songs really to be the eschatological 'spirit' of Scripture made manifest as text.

1

Origen and the Spiritual Reading of the Song of Songs

THE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER OF THE SONG OF SONGS

The Song of Songs as 'total allegory'

Perhaps no feature of Origen's exegesis of the Song of Songs is as widely known both in Origen studies and in the history of Song interpretation as the fact that Origen scrupulously excludes a 'literal meaning' from the Song. For example, in his survey of various appropriations of the 'literal meaning' in the lineage of Song commentary, R. W. Corney's first observation concerning Origen's exegesis is that 'in Origen's view the Song was intended by its author Solomon to be read as an allegory, and it never functioned in any other way'.[1] This, then, is commonly recognized to be the primary feature of Origen's exegesis and an important part of his lasting contribution to the Christian allegorical reading of the Song.

Although Hippolytus, as we have noted above, has been properly credited with inaugurating the Christian allegorical exegesis of the Song, Origen must be recognized as the first patristic author positively to exclude any interpretation of the text that is not of a spiritual character.[2] In other words, it is Origen who, among Christians, first

[1] R. W. Corney, 'What Does "Literal Meaning" Mean? Some Commentaries on the Song of Songs', *ATR* 80:4 (Fall, 1998), 500.

[2] Its invention credited by the ancients to Theagenes of Rhegium, the device of allegory itself was already in use among the Greeks several centuries before Christianity (at least as early as the 6th cent. BC) and persisted among the Neo-Platonists

reads the Song as what we might call 'total allegory': 'allegory' because this text (Origen believes) says something quite other than what might seem obvious to the uninitiated reader; 'total', because the whole text in its every aspect and modality speaks in this manner, with no surplus whatsoever of a conventional, obvious, or corporeal meaning remaining behind.[3]

Two alternative readings of the Song of Songs

Thus Origen depends upon a theological assessment of the Song and its nuptial contents that wholly contrasts with an approach that takes this poem—or poetic anthology—in the first instance to celebrate an earthly love affair. Crouzel summarizes the central point of disagreement between these two contrary points of view, asking:

> ... est-ce un poème d'amour humain qui a été ensuite considéré dès avant le Christ par les Juifs comme une allégorie de l'amour de Dieu pour son peuple, ou un poème exprimant allégoriquement dès le départ l'amour divin? ... Pour les partisans de la seconde opinion il est évident que sens littéral et sens allégorique coïncident ... Origène est intimement persuadé que la signification qu'a voulue l'Esprit Saint en inspirant cet écrit est de symboliser l'amour divin: il est d'accord avec les partisans de la seconde opinion.[4]

The first way of reading the text, then, sees in it a simple human love-poem. Only through a history of allegorical interpretation, which has nothing to say of the Song's original meaning, has it acquired its religious significance. The second way, by contrast, takes the divine inspiration of the Song as its starting point. Its proponents, conse-

well after Origen's death. For this reference and a brief survey of the Greek pagan allegorical tradition, from a hermeneutical perspective, see M. Edwards, 'Gnostics, Greeks, and Origen: the Interpretation of Interpretation', *JTS* 44 (1993), 71–7.

[3] An important feature distinguishes Origen's 'total allegorizing' of the Song from pagan Greek allegories of indecorous myths—where the Greek allegorists tended to read mythical records of intercourse among the gods as transposed images of physical or metaphysical principles (for Socrates' scorn of these, see Plato, *Phaedrus* 229C–230A), Origen sustains the personal (and not merely principial) identity of the characters in the Song; and similarly, at the summit of his 'total allegory' of the Song, the nature of love (*agapê* or *erôs*) becomes most intensely personal just as it becomes most intensely metaphysical.

[4] Introduction to *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (*SC* 375), 18.

quently, understand a religious sense, usually allegorical, to have belonged to the Song from the beginning.

As Crouzel correctly judges, Origen is an adherent of the second school. At no time, Origen thinks, did the human scribe (Solomon the prophet) or its divine author ever intend the Song (1) to be an earthly marriage-song, (2) to dramatize a story of human espousal, marriage, and physical *erôs*, or (3) to exalt and laud human married love. Origen seems to have read the Song as 'total allegory' even during the early, more experimental period of his exegetical work. The one extant passage from his early commentary obviously belongs to a longer discussion in which Origen already argues for the need to read the Song in a fully mystical and spiritual way. But it is in the later *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song*, however, that we find a very complete development of this conception only hinted at in the *Philocalia* fragment.

Origen's spiritualization of word and action in the Song of Songs

These works attest in a variety of ways Origen's intention to read the Song as 'total allegory'. Origen reads as 'total allegory' not only the explicitly nuptial language and actions of the Song but every word, phrase, and notion of the text. The most central of these transformations of meaning should already be known to the reader: the Bridegroom and Bride as Christ and his Beloved, united both in her true love as desire for ultimate things and in his desire that she might attain them—in him. But the reader may dip his hand into the *Commentary* at random and come up with any number of other corroborative examples: 'kisses' denote teachings; ornaments, truths, and virtues. 'Breasts' (Song 1: 2b) name the ἡγεμονικόν or *principale cordis*. 'Spices' (Song 1: 3a) are the material elements in the body of the Incarnate Logos, and 'oil' the Holy Spirit who reduces them to the unity of the Person of Christ. The King's 'chamber' (Song 1: 4c) identifies the Lord's 'own secret and mysterious mind'; 'foxes' are heretics or errant thoughts.[5] There are hundreds of others such as these.

[5] For 'kisses', *Cant.* 1.1 (*SC* 375. 176–86); 'breasts', 1.2.1–9 (*SC* 375. 190–6); 'spices' and 'oil', 1.3 (*SC* 375. 208–16); 'chamber', 1.5 (*SC* 375. 142–6); 'foxes', 4.3 (*SC* 375. 720–39) = Lawson (3.16), 254–63.

All the action of the text is, from Origen's vantage point, spiritual as well. Thus, to 'kiss' is to teach in the context of loving mutuality. The 'emptying out' of ointment (Song 1: 3b) is Christ's abdication of glory in a *kenôsis* prolonged historically through the worldwide apostolic mission. When the Sun 'look[s] down' (Song 1: 6a), it is the judgment of the *Sol Iustitiae* upon the soul that is represented in the female speaker; to 'sit' (Song 2: 3) is to rest in the overshadowing presence of Christ; when the dove takes wing (Song 2: 10b), those who have accepted the death of Christ 'fly from earthly and corporeal places to heavenly ones' (*de terrenis et corporeis locis evolent ad caelestia*).[6] All of these spiritual actions, in turn, are but participations in the underlying and all-comprehending nuptial drama.

In other words, Origen excludes a 'literal sense' from every expression of the Song and not only from those passages that speak of human bodies and their erotic/sexual interactions. What this means in Origen's exegesis of the Song is that every reference to persons, places, objects, animals, plants, or events—in short, any expression that would ordinarily bear a temporal or corporeal sense—is taken as the name of some spiritual reality or spiritual event, and that alone. What appears to the eyes of the uninstructed, the immature or, worst of all, the carnal mind to be the obvious meaning of the text is, in fact, not its meaning at all, since it does not spring authentically from God's real teaching aims.

Origen's spiritualization of the Song as text

Origen's spiritualization of the Song would seem already to be complete. Yet, he presses the boundaries of his 'total allegory' beyond the Song's content (i.e. the story-line, specific words, and expressions) to embrace and transfigure the form of the text as a literary reality. In other words, the Song's every mode and manner of communication, as well as what it communicates, will receive from Origen a wholly spiritual interpretation. Origen makes the *whole text itself*, considered as a literary production, bear a purely spiritual significance.

[6] For 'kiss', *Cant.* 1.1.8–15 (*SC* 375. 182–7); 'emptying out', 1.4.1–6 (*SC* 375. 220–4); the sun 'look[ing] down', 2.5.5–9 (*SC* 375. 300–2); 'sit', 3.5.9–19 (*SC* 376. 528–34); the 'flight of the dove', 4.1.5 (*SC* 376. 680).

The importance of this last point cannot be overemphasized, even though its full meaning and significance to Origen's exegesis of the Song will not come into view until the latter chapters of this study. For the moment, we should at least become familiar with the scale on which Origen conceives of the Song's pure spirituality. Following, then, is a collection of the most illustrative texts from the *Commentary* and *Homilies*, subdivided by theme into five sections:

(1) *The Song is simply—as its name suggests—the perfect song, and therefore includes nothing that is corporeal or carnal, whether in theme or in meaning*:[7]

(*a*) the perfect and mystical song;

(*b*) . . . in the Song of Songs, where now perfection is shown forth, he describes himself neither as Son of David, nor as king . . . ;

(*c*) . . . we find in this little book that was to be written about the love of the Bridegroom and the Bride, neither 'Son of David', nor 'king', nor any other term patient of a corporeal connotation;

(*d*) So the Song of Songs is simply Solomon's; it belongs neither to the Son of David, nor to Israel's king, and there is no suggestion of anything carnal about it.

(2) *The Song, as drama, is woven entirely of mystical discourses or dialogues spoken by the heavenly Bride and Bridegroom, and their attendants:* [8]

(*a*) the whole body of it consists of mystical utterances;

(*b*) Solomon . . . sang under the figure of the Bride, about to wed and burning with heavenly love towards her Bridegroom, who is the Word of God;

(*c*) But this same Scripture also teaches us what words this august and perfect Bridegroom used in speaking to the soul, or to the Church, who has been joined to Him;

(*d*) . . . in which same song, the Bride no longer wants the Bridegroom's friends to sing to her, but longs to hear her Spouse who now is with her, speak with his own lips, wherefore she says: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.'

[7] For (*a*) *Cant.* prol. 4.5 (*SC* 375. 148–50); (*b*) prol. 4.28 (*SC* 375. 166); (*c*) prol. 4.21 (*SC* 375. 160); (*d*) prol. 4.21 (*SC* 375. 162).

[8] For (*a*) *Cant.* prol. 1.3 (*SC* 375. 82); (*b*) prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80); (*c*) prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80); (*d*) prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 148).

(3) *The Song, as epithalamium, is constituted solely of the heavenly Bridegroom's utterance (i.e. it is Christ alone who speaks)*:[9]

(*a*) All those [other songs], then, that were uttered by them [prophets or angels], were the introductory songs sung by the Bridegroom's friends; this song is the very one which was at last to be sung—in the guise of an epithalamium—by the Bridegroom himself, when about to take his Bride;

(*b*) . . . this song that Solomon [i.e. as living type of Christ] sang is the Song of Songs not only in relation to those that were sung before it, but also in respect of those that followed it in time;

(*c*) And the fact that in the Song of Songs, where now perfection is shown forth, he [i.e. Solomon as type of Christ] describes himself neither as Son of David, nor as king, enables us to say further that, since the servant has been made the lord, and the disciple as the master, the servant obviously is such no longer: he has become as the lord.

(4) *The Song offers instruction suited only to the spiritual needs of the 'perfect', who are the proper recipients of its mystical pedagogy*:[10]

(*a*) For in the words of the Song of Songs there is that food, of which the Apostle says that 'strong meat is for the perfect'; and that food calls for hearers 'who by ability have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil';

(*b*) And there is another practice too that we have received from [the Hebrews]—namely, that all the Scriptures should be delivered to boys by teachers and wise men, while at the same the four that they call the *deuterôseis*—that is to say, the beginning of Genesis, in which the creation of the world is described; the first chapters of Ezechiel, which tell about the cherubim; the end of that same, which contains the building of the Temple; and this book of the Song of Songs—should be reserved for study till the last;

(*c*) But this song is sung to her, now that she is grown up, and very strong, and ready for a husband's power and the perfect mystery;

[9] For (*a*) *Cant.* prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 148), my translation; (*b*) *Cant.* prol. 4.13 (*SC* 375. 156); (*c*) *Cant.* 4.28 (*SC* 375. 166).

[10] For (*a*) *Cant.* prol. 1.4 (*SC* 375. 82); (*b*) *Cant.* prol. 1.7 (*SC* 375. 84–6); (*c*) *Cant.* prol. 4.4 (*SC* 375. 148); (*d*) *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (37bis. 64); (*e*) *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (37bis. 66).

(*d*) Blessed likewise is he who understands songs and sings them . . . but much more blest is he who sings the Song of Songs;

(*e*) . . . so also is it hard to find a man competent to scale the heights of the Song of Songs, even though he has traversed all the songs of Scripture;

(5) *The Song gives instruction in the arts of a purely spiritual, not physical, love that strengthens chastity and leads to contemplation of God* (*θεωρία*):[11]

(*a*) . . . So that we . . . may be able to make clear a wholesome meaning in regard to the name and nature of love, and one that is apt for the building up of chastity;

(*b*) The study called inspective is that by which we go beyond things seen and contemplate somewhat of things divine and heavenly, beholding them with the mind alone, for they are beyond the range of bodily sight . . . The inspective science likewise he has propounded in this little book that we have now in hand—that is, the Song of Songs. In this he drives into (*incutit*) the soul the love of things divine and heavenly, using for his purpose the figure of the Bride and Bridegroom, and teaches us that communion with God must be attained by the paths of charity and love;

(*c*) . . . the soul . . . is competent to proceed to dogmatic and mystical matters, and in this way advances to the contemplation of the Godhead with pure and spiritual love;

(*d*) He, therefore, who can discern the spiritual sense of Scripture . . . must strive his utmost to live not after flesh and blood, so that he may become worthy of spiritual mysteries and—if I may speak boldly—of spiritual desire and love, if such indeed there be.

On the one hand, then, Origen identifies what the Song teaches and imparts as its whole spiritual theme, its whole *raison d'ētre*: its dogmatic lessons regarding the 'name and nature of love' and the inspective science of contemplation (5); its figural representation of the heavenly nuptial life (see 2); the intensity of love that suffuses the text (2*b*, *d*); and finally the various lessons taught in the words of the

[11] For (*a*) *Cant.* prol. 2.3 (*SC* 375. 92); (*b*) *Cant.* prol. 3.3, 7 (*SC* 375. 130, 132), Lawson 41 (emended); (*c*) *Cant.* prol. 3.16 (*SC* 375. 138); (*d*) *Hom. in Cant.* 1.2 (37bis. 71).

Song's players (2 and 3). On the other hand, Origen also makes it clear that the form of the text is also to be understood in a non-sensible way: it reveals perfection *qua* perfection (1*b*); it consists wholly of the mystical speech-acts of spiritual, incorporeal beings (2 and 3); it belongs to two genres—drama and marriage-song—that are made spiritual through their 'bodiless' mode of performance (2 and 3); and its spiritual teaching must be received by 'perfect' hearers (4) in a 'spiritual manner'.

How would Origen have us understand and then appropriate the Song's thoroughgoing spirituality? The remainder of this study will be dedicated to answering the question in depth. We must, however, begin with a preliminary investigation of Origen's hermeneutic and doctrine of Scripture, in the context of which he situates those biblical texts that, like the Song, have no conventional 'literal sense'. This investigation will form the necessary background to our whole study.

THE SONG OF SONGS AND THE PROBLEM OF 'BODILESS' TEXTS

The twofold hermeneutical structure of Scripture: 'letter' and 'spirit'

With nearly the whole exegetical tradition of Christian antiquity, Origen understands the Scriptures to be a twofold composition of 'letter' and 'spirit'.[12] The perception of a twofoldness in the order of

[12] There are many studies of Origen's biblical Logos theology, hermeneutics, and exegetical methods. Those with which I have been primarily engaged in preparing this study are R. Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes* (Düsseldorf, 1963); Hanson, *Allegory and Event*; M. Harl, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice de la Verbe Incarné,* Patristica Sorbonensia 2 (Paris, 1958); P. A. Lieske, *Die Theologie der Logos-mystik bei Origenes*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 22 (Westfalen, 1938); H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale, i. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Paris, 1959) and *Histoire et Esprit: l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris, 1950); and Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*. For a brief overview of Origen's hermeneutic, yet orientated to his reading of the Song, see D. Dawson, 'Allegorical Reading and the Embodiment of the Soul in Origen', in *Christian Origins*, ed. L. Ayres and G. Jones (London, 1998), 26–43. A good historical overview of patristic exegesis is to be found in B. de Margerie, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse, i: Les Pères grecs et orientaux* (Paris, 1980), esp. 113–36).

revelation originates with Paul, who uses 'letter' and 'spirit' to designate the specific difference between life under the old Law and the new life in Christ.[13] Thus 'letter' and 'spirit' provide Paul with a hermeneutical standard for assessing not only the novel meaning of Christian experience but also, with respect to the actual reading of Scripture, an interpretative formula that makes possible his experiments in a distinctively Christian typological reading of Old Testament events.[14]

Yet, what Paul does not develop out of this dyad of 'letter and spirit' is precisely what lies at the heart of Origen's appropriation of these categories: a metaphysical distinction between the noetic and the sensible that, applied to Scripture, illuminates a corresponding hermeneutical distinction in the text.[15] In Origen's usage, then, 'letter' (*γράμμα*) and 'spirit' (*πνεῦμα*) come to denote what Torjesen calls a 'hermeneutical structure of two levels'.[16] Origen understands the whole canon of Scripture to be constituted out of these 'levels'—though we might better describe them as 'dimensions' or even 'modalities', so intimately are they united.

These two 'levels' concretely realize the two divine aims or *σκοποί* in which Origen locates the transcendental origins of Scripture, one

[13] i.e. the slavery of the 'old letter' versus the 'newness of the spirit' (Romans 7: 6) or the death-dealing cultic 'letter' of the Old Covenant and the life-giving Spirit of the New (2 Cor. 3: 6). Thus in Paul, 'letter' and 'spirit' become abbreviations for the insufficiency and even the spiritual danger of the old Law when set beside the New Covenant of grace and mercy (cf. Rom. 2: 29).

[14] On Origen's typological reading of Scripture, see esp. Daniélou, *Origène*, 145–74. Daniélou makes too much of the distinction between typology and allegory, and hence construes a false division in Origen's exegesis between typological (as authentic and biblical) readings and allegorical (as inauthentic and 'non-Christian') ones.

[15] The metaphysical scope of Origen's allegorism has often led to criticisms that his reading of Scripture devalues the historical and concrete (e.g. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 76). Others disagree strongly with this critique, notably H. de Lubac, who confirms Origen's commitment to the integrity of the 'literal sense', as well as Torjesen (*Hermeneutical Procedure*, 117–21), L. W. Barnard ('To Allegorize or not to Allegorize?', *ST* 36 (1982), 1–10), and J. D. Wilkinson ('A Defence of Origenist Allegory', in *Texte und Untersuchungen* 81 = *SP* 6 (1962), 264–8), all of whom demonstrate that Origen always strives to relate his interpretations to the concrete situation of his audience.

[16] ' "Body", "Soul", and "Spirit" in Origen's Theory of Exegesis', *ATR* 67:1 (Jan., 1985), 19.

ordered to the benefit of the mature Christian, the other to that of the less experienced.

(1) *God's 'principal aim'* (ὁ προηγουμένος σκοπός),[17] *corresponding to the 'spirit'*: '... [the Spirit's] purpose being that the one who is capable of being taught might by "searching out" and devoting himself to the "deep things" revealed in the spiritual meaning of the words become partaker of all the doctrines of his will (κοινωνὸς τῶν ὅλων τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ γένηται δογμάτων)';[18] and

(2) *God's 'second aim'* (ὁ δεύτερος σκοπός), *corresponding to the 'letter'*: 'pursued for the sake of those who were unable to endure the burden of investigating matters of such importance ... to conceal the doctrine relating to the before-mentioned subjects in words forming a narrative that contained a record dealing with the visible creation ... and through a written system of law ... recorded in a series with a power which is truly appropriate to the wisdom of God'.[19]

The term σκοπός ('aim', 'scope', 'purpose') designates one of Origen's most important hermeneutical principles, and in *On First Principles* complements the sense of a second term—βούλημα—in describing the teaching aim pursued in all Scripture. *Boulêma* denotes the intended meaning of any given passage or book of Scripture, and Origen preserves its close relationship to its Greek root, βουλή or will.[20] According to Origen, every part of Scripture, even to its least details, has been shaped and determined by God's *boulê*; hence, Scripture is intrinsically capable of conveying its meaning (*boulêma*) through the effective operation of God's will (*boulê*) in it. So close in meaning are these two words for Origen, that at times he uses them interchangeably.[21]

[17] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336).

[18] *Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 326–8), tr. Butterworth, 282 (emended).

[19] *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 332–4).

[20] For βούλημα, see e.g. *Cels.* 2. 76 (*SC* 132. 466): τὸ βούλημα τῶν προφητικῶν λόγων; and *Jo.* 10.286 (*SC* 157. 560): ἵνα κατὰ τὸ βούλημα τοῦ οἰκονομήσαντος, ταῦτα γραφῆναι, πνευματικῶς ἐκλάβωμεν ἕκαστον τῶν εἰρημένων. For these citations and full discussion see de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 301–4. Torjesen notes that *skopos* and *boulêma* are complementary terms (*Hermeneutical Procedure*, 144).

[21] Compare (1) 'as a result of the inspiration (ἐξ ἐπιπνοίας) of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father (βουλήματι τοῦ πατρὸς)', *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 300), with (2) 'become partaker of all the doctrines of [the Spirit's] will (τῆς βουλῆς αὐτου)', *Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 328), tr. Butterworth, 282 (emended).

What, then, is the meaning of *skopos*? *Skopos*, in Origen's usage, denotes the general purpose of God in inspiring Scripture or any discrete part of Scripture (e.g. a canonical book). Whereas *boulêma* denotes the intention of the Holy Trinity as it is manifested concretely and specifically in meaning, *skopos* signifies God's underlying intention to instruct.[22] Origen expresses it as follows in *On First Principles*:

This being so, we must outline what seems for us to be the marks of a true understanding of the Scriptures. And in the first place we must point out that the aim (σκοπός) of the Spirit who, by the providence of God through the Word who was in the beginning with God, enlightened the servants of the truth, that is, the prophets and apostles, was pre-eminently concerned with the unspeakable mysteries (τῶν ἀπορρήτων μυστηρίων) connected with the affairs of human beings . . . [23]

Aim or *skopos* comes to expression in meaning or *boulê*. The 'unspeakable mysteries' which Origen goes on to enumerate are the saving doctrines of Christianity—what Torjesen has called the 'form of the contemporary pedagogy of the Logos'.[24] Origen stresses that without knowledge of these doctrines salvation is ultimately impossible. This is why God has given us inspired Scripture: '. . . we speak of the needs of souls, who cannot otherwise reach perfection except through the rich and wise truth about God . . .'[25]

Thus the apparent crudity of the 'letter' (ἐν εὐτέλεια καὶ εὐκαταφρόνητος λέξις),[26] which some pagans find contemptible, arises from God's long-suffering efforts to improve and converse with those who presently are capable only of elementary conceptions. For this reason, the constellation of terms used by Origen in his analysis of what we usually call the 'literal sense'—'letter' (γράμμα), 'text' (λέξις),

[22] Later exegetes adopted a similar technical use of *skopos*, probably under Origen's influence. For example, P. Mar Gregorios discusses at length the prominence of *skopos* in Gregory of Nyssa's hermeneutic; see *Cosmic Man, the Divine Presence: The Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330 to 395 A.D)* (New York, 1988), *skopos* pp. 1–23, *akolouthia* pp. 47–63); de Margerie recognizes Gregory's dependence on Origen (*Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse*, 125, 249–69).

[23] *Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 326–8), tr. Butterworth, 282 (emended).

[24] *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 117–18.

[25] *Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 328), tr. Butterworth, 282.

[26] *Princ.* 4.1.7 (*SC* 268. 288).

'expression' (ῥητός), 'flesh' (σάρξ), or 'body' (σῶμα) of Scripture[27]—nearly always identify a kind of reading that adheres naively and often obdurately to historical or somatic conceptions. And because this mode of interpretation engages the soul's faculty for attaching itself to physically perceptible things by means of the senses and the sensible imagination (αἴσθησις; φαντασία),[28] Origen also speaks of it as 'sensible' exegesis (κατὰ τὸ αἰσθητόν, δἰ αἰσθητῶν, αἰσθητῶς).[29]

The 'spirit' (πνεῦμα) or the 'spiritual aspect' (τὸ πνευματικόν) of Scripture,[30] by contrast, is recognized by its inherent power (δύναμις)[31] to lead human beings away from their attachment to the untransfigured worldly things that are called to mind in the 'letter'. Hence, the 'spirit' of Scripture effects the soul's conversion and return to the wholly spiritual and immaterial nature of God.[32] This conversion involves a restoration not only to a true knowledge of God as pure spirit but also to the soul's own original character as a reasonable being created in God's spiritual image and likeness; according to Origen's exegesis of Song 1: 8, this special form of theological self-knowledge is an indispensable dimension of transformation in God.[33] In advancing in this transformation, the soul effectually proves to itself that the text originates in God, that the Scriptures possess an inspiration (ἐπίπνοια) or God-breathed (θεόπνευστος)[34] quality consubstantial with the 'letter' as its innate divinity (τῆς γραφῆς θειότης διατείνουσα εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτήν).[35] In short, the 'spirit' is that whereby the materiality of the text has, in countless modes and degrees, been

[27] For γράμμα, *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 300); 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 314). For λέξις, *Princ.* 4.1.7 (*SC* 268. 288); 4.2.1 (*SC* 268. 294). For ῥητός, *Princ.* 4.3.1 (*SC* 268. 346); 4.3.4 (*SC* 268. 356). For σάρξ, *Princ.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 310); *caro, Hom. in Lev.* 5.1.1 (*SC* 286. 206). For σῶμα, *Princ.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 312).

[28] See esp. *Princ.* 2.8 (*SC* 252. 336–52); 3.4.4 (*SC* 268. 210–12); 3.1.1–3 (*SC* 268. 16–26).

[29] *Princ.* 4.2.1 (*SC* 268. 270); 4.3.4 (*SC* 268. 358);

[30] For πνεῦμα, *Princ.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 312); 4.2.5 (*SC* 268. 316). For τὸ πνευματικόν, *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 300); 4.3.5 (*SC* 268. 362), as contrasted with τὸ σωματικόν, *Princ.* 4.3.5 (*SC* 268. 362): 'ὅτι πᾶσα μὲν ἔχει τὸ πνευματικόν, οὐ πᾶσα δὲ τὸ σωματικόν'.

[31] *Princ.* 4.1.6 (*SC* 268. 280).

[32] *Princ.* 4.1.1 (*SC* 268. 402–4); 4.1.6 (*SC* 268. 280–2); 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 326–32); 4.3.15 (*SC* 268. 396–8). On inspiration as transformative efficacy, see Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 36–8.

[33] *Cant.* 2.5.1–2 (*SC* 375. 354–6): 'anima . . . ad imaginem Dei facta'.

[34] For ἐπίπνοια, *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 300); For θεόπνευστος, *Princ.* 4.1.6 (*SC* 268. 280).

[35] *Princ.* 4.1.7 (*SC* 268. 286).

made divine (*εἶναι θείων γραφῶν, περὶ θείων γραμμάτων*).[36] The divinity or 'spirit' of Scripture is united with the materiality of the 'letter' without being confused with it.

The implicit analogy here to the bodily Incarnation of the Logos is not accidental.[37] For Origen, as the 'flesh' of Christ is to his divinity, so is the 'letter' to Scripture's 'spirit', which is nothing other than the 'mind of Christ' (*νοῦς Χριστοῦ*) immanent in the whole text.[38] As R. Gögler observes, the Logos as person is the 'objective element' (*objektives Element*) of meaning and presence in the finite structures of the sacred text.[39] Origen explicitly articulates this incarnational view of the biblical text in such passages as the one that follows, from the beginning of *Homily 1 on Leviticus*:

As 'in the Last Days' (Acts 2: 17), the Word of God, which was clothed with the flesh of Mary, proceeded into this world. What was seen in him was one thing; what was understood was something else. For the sight of his flesh was open for all to see, but the knowledge of his divinity was given to the few, even the elect. So also when the Word of God was brought to humans through the Prophets and the Lawgiver, it was not brought without proper clothing. For just as there it was covered with the veil of flesh, so here with the veil of the letter, so that indeed the letter is seen as flesh but the spiritual sense hiding within is perceived as divinity.[40]

[36] *Princ.* 4.1.1 (*SC* 268. 258). As Torjesen has noted, by 'divine Scriptures' Origen means 'not so much that Scripture is authoritative, but that it is powerful, that there is a divine energy (*δύναμις*) operating through it'; see 'Hermeneutics and Soteriology in Origen's *Peri Archon*', *SP* 21 (1989), 347.

[37] Indeed, Origen's entire theology of Scripture can be profitably approached as a special application of the incarnational principle. For a detailed study of this question, see Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes*, esp. pp. 299–364. Gögler shows that Origen discerns in Scripture, as in the bodily Incarnation, a special accommodation or *kenôsis* of the divine Logos to the soul's limitation to the physical senses for acquiring knowledge.

[38] *Princ.* 4.2.3 (*SC* 268. 306): *ἅτε νοῦς ὢν Χριστοῦ*. By interpolating the word 'interpretation' into Origen's text ('since it is an interpretation of the mind of Christ'), Butterworth's translation obscures the immediacy with which Origen understands the 'mind of Christ' to be available in the text, making it more a nominal presence than a real one.

[39] *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes*, 264. Gögler also remarks, 'Indem Origenes den Logos der Schrift bei namen "Christus" nennt, behauptet er dessen Identität mit dem personalen Logos. *Wo das Wort Gottes ist, da ist Christus, der präexistente personhafte Logos*', p. 263 (emphasis in text).

[40] 'Sicut in novissimus diebus Verbum Dei ex Maria carne vestitum processit in hunc mundum et aliud quidem erat, quod videbatur in eo, aliud, quod intelligeba-

The 'letter', then, is the 'flesh' (σάρξ) or 'body' (σῶμα) of Christ, a perfect but 'sensible' unity in which the divinity of the Word becomes present to the limited powers of human comprehension. M. Fédou sums up Origen's position eloquently:

> Telle est la profondeur à laquelle Origène perçoit la relation de l'Écriture avec le Christ. Au-delà des textes qui annoncent explicitement le Sauveur, la Parole biblique est en elle-même comme une première incarnation de Celui qui est venu habiter le langage des hommes et qui, par ce chemin, a commencé d'ouvrir les hommes à la révélation de Dieu.[41]

As was so often true, Origen's analogy between the *verbum dei incarnatum* and the *verbum dei scriptum* became a permanent feature of his legacy to the growing patristic tradition.[42]

The question of 'bodiless' texts

All Scriptures, by virtue of their being composed of verbal signs, share in the character of the 'letter' (*gramma*); indeed, Origen calls the biblical texts *graphai* ('Scriptures') and *grammatai* ('letters') indiscriminately.[43] Yet, he also asserts that some scriptural texts do not possess a 'bodily' character (*sômatikon*), that is, a meaning that one can grasp through a 'sensible' reading (*kata to aisthêton*) of the text. He explains: 'But since certain Scriptures possess no bodiliness whatsoever, as we shall show in what follows, there are cases where it is necessary to seek only, as it were, for the soul and the spirit of the Scripture.'[44] Origen's allusion to a threefold anthropological (body–

tur—carnis namque adspectus in eo patebat omnibus, paucis vero et electis dabatur divinitatis agnitio—ita et cum per prophetas vel legislatorem Verbum Dei profertur ad homines, non absque competentibus profertur indumentis. Nam sicut ibi carnis, ita hic litterae velamine tegitur, ut littera quidem adspiciatur tamquam caro, latens vero intrinsecus spiritalis sensus tamquam divinitas sentiatur', *Hom. in Lev.* 1.1 (*SC* 286. 66–70), tr. Barkley, 29.

[41] M. Fédou, *La sagesse et le monde: le Christ d'Origène*, Collection Jésus et Jésus-Christ 64 (Paris, 1995), 68–9.

[42] See J. H. Crehan, 'The Analogy Between *Verbum Dei Incarnatum* and *Verbum Dei Scriptum* in the Fathers', *JTS* 6 (1955), 87–90.

[43] For both expressions, used interchangeably, see *Princ.* 4.1.1 (*SC* 268. 258).

[44] Ἀλλ᾽ἐπεί εἰσί τινες γραφαὶ τὸ σωματικὸν οὐδαμῶς ἔχουσαι, ὡς ἐν τοῖς ἑξῆς δείξομεν, ἔστιν ὅπου οἱονεὶ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς γραφῆς μόνα χρὴ ζητεῖν, *Princ.* 4.2.5 (*SC* 268. 316), my translation.

soul–spirit) reading of Scripture, in addition to its twofold (letter–spirit) structure, need not detain us in this study.[45] More important for our discussion is that, given the close relationship between 'body' and 'letter' noted above, we can already surmise that 'bodiless' (ἀσώματος) or asomatic texts are 'total allegories', texts that we would say have no 'literal sense'.

What, then, does Origen mean by denying 'body' to certain biblical texts? A fairly representative explanation appears in J. Daniélou's survey of Origen's hermeneutic and exegesis. He writes:

> N'ont en effet dans sa pensée un sens littéral que les passages qui sont à prendre au sens propre. Au contraire ont un sens spirituel dans son vocabulaire d'abord tous les passages de l'Écriture dont le sens littéral est figuré, toutes les paraboles, tous les passages dont l'interprétation est allégorique dans l'intention même de l'auteur, comme le Cantique des Cantiques ou le début de la Genèse, et Origène étend ceci à cause des difficultés qu'ils présentent, à bien des passages dont le sens littéral est evidemment propre . . .[46]

Daniélou brackets a class of scriptural texts whose whole meaning (i.e. for Daniélou, that meaning which the author intends) is expressed in figurative speech that is intended by the author to be read as allegory. Today, Daniélou explains, we would (1) simply say that the allegorical meaning is the text's literal or intended sense, and (2) treat the figurative language which couches the allegory as a purely metaphorical gesture towards the literal. Origen, by contrast, will understand the proper and exact sense of the figural language (i.e. the actual words of the text) to be the literal meaning, whose character requires the text to be read spiritually.

Underlying Daniélou's explanation is the supposition that Origen arrives at his spiritual reading of 'bodiless' texts only through a negation of their literal sense. Certainly, Daniélou acknowledges

[45] The most illuminating attempt to reckon with the Origen's threefold 'anthropological' division of texts may be found in K. Torjesen's ' "Body", "Soul", and "Spirit" in Origen's Theory of Exegesis', *ATR* 67:1 (Jan., 1985), 17–30. Torjesen not only surveys prior explanations of this problematic feature of Origen's exegesis but also develops a significant, if incomplete, correlation between his three ways of reading Scripture (as 'body', 'soul', and 'spirit') and the multiple pedagogical aims that he brings to any exegetical project.

[46] Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris, 1948), 182.

that Origen locates the literal sense at a different level in the order of meanings than would the typical modern reader. Moreover, Daniélou assumes that even the modern reader must decisively reject what he later calls the *sens propre* of the figure—that is, the imaginative background of its metaphorical form which has nothing to do with its actual meaning in context. Yet, with Daniélou's assessment of Origen, the apparent negation of the literal sense becomes more obvious, precisely because Origen seems to make it an explicit step in the exegesis of 'bodiless' texts.

This approach to the problem of the 'bodiless' texts is, however, vitiated by a serious flaw: it proceeds on the assumption that Origen posits a simple and wholly convertible identity between the 'letter' (*gramma*) and the 'body' (*sôma*) of a biblical text. Since Origen so closely correlates the *gramma* of Scripture with its very textuality, it would seem that a negation of its *sôma* would imply a coordinate negation of its textuality. This line of reasoning easily leads to the sort of bewildering analysis that we find in the following statement from Crouzel:

> La difficulté vient de ce que le sens littéral ou corporel n'a pas la même définition chez Origène et chez les modernes. Alors que nous appelons ordinairement ainsi ce que l'écrivain sacré voulait exprimer, Origène entend par cette expression la matérialité brute de ce qui est dit, préalablement, si c'était possible, à toute tentative d'interprétation.[47]

Crouzel has explained the 'bodiless' text in a way that removes the literal sense from the order of meaning altogether. He seems to be suggesting that, somehow, the 'sens littéral ou corporel' of a text can be had apart from interpretation. Yet Origen always understands meaning and interpretation—*nous* and *noêsis*—to go hand in hand. Crouzel's temporizing—'si c'était possible'—reveals his own perplexity, and underscores the difficulty of the issues involved.

The conflation of 'letter' and 'body'—as represented in Crouzel's 'sens littéral ou corporel'—displays a tendency to substitute a merely hermeneutical problem (how to generate appropriate and intended meanings from a text) for Origen's fundamentally epistemological one (how to generate in the mind forms of understanding appropri-

[47] Crouzel, *Origène* (Paris, 1985), 92–3.

ate to all the text's virtualities). This conflation is especially observable in the persistent use of the term 'literal sense' to designate both the 'letter' (> 'literal') and the 'body' or bodily *aisthêsis* (> 'sense') of Origen's hermeneutic. In fact, however, the phrase 'literal sense' is altogether foreign to Origen's Greek usage. Nevertheless, even quite dependable translations of the hermeneutical chapters in *On First Principles* use the expressions 'literal sense' or 'literally' in ways that obscure Origen's epistemological focus.

For example, Origen writes of the Jews that 'they think they are keeping closely to the text (alternatively, "exact reading") of the prophecies (*λέξει τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ προφητειῶν*), and they do not see him sensibly (*αἰσθητῶς*) preaching "release to the captives" ' and thus count this as reason for their unbelief.[48] Crouzel, however, gives us 'letter' instead of 'text' and 'literally' for 'sensibly'. And so his translation would lead the reader to suppose that a literal reading of any text is simply reducible to a reading in light of the body's ordinary 'sensibility' (*aisthêsis*).

In fact, Origen's carefully constructed terminology points to a real distinction between *gramma*—the fixity, structure, and form of the written text—and *sôma*—the fixed and limited understanding found in, and in a sense imputed to, the *gramma* by the materialistic *habitus* that is our mind's second nature. True, this distinction remains merely formal and implicit in texts that have a 'body'. But in those that do not, the distinction becomes an actual one. The *gramma* of the text itself—as in the Song—is liberated in the direction of the 'spirit', even if the broken wing of human understanding has not mended enough to fly with it. The asomatic text, in other words, does not cease to be 'letter' or literal. To read a 'bodiless' text is not to negate the 'letter' but rather to affirm it, and oneself with it, at a higher level.

The Song of Songs as 'bodiless' text

The Song of Songs, like the creation narrative of Genesis, is just such an asomatic text and so, Origen thinks, requires a wholly 'spiritual' reading. In other words, the text of the Song makes only 'spirit' and

[48] *Princ.* 4.2.1 (*SC* 268. 294).

spiritual meanings available to the reader. But, equally, the 'letter', which usually 'conceals', 'veils', or 'contains' the 'spirit', has not simply disappeared in the Song. Rather, to use Crouzel's apt expression—even if he does not follow out its implications—the 'sens littéral et sens allégorique coïncident'. The 'letter' of these 'bodiless' texts remains intact, coincident with the allegorical or figurative (cf. Daniélou) meaning.

This coincidence would seem to mean nothing less than that the literal meaning, which stands apart and inferior in most other Scriptures, is the spiritual meaning in the 'bodiless' text. Hence, we may postulate that Origen's reading of the Song will not in the end sustain any real, but only a virtual, distinction between the text's literal form and its spiritual content. In the Song, it would appear that the 'letter' has been transformed into 'spirit'. No remainder of 'sensibility' in the 'letter' has been left behind. As R. W. Corney aptly observes, 'the literal meaning of the text, therefore, is not to be found in some referent external to the text, but in the "letter" of the text, in the words themselves.'[49] If we are to seek the 'literal meaning of the text' only 'in the words themselves'—that is, in wholly 'bodiless' and spiritual words—then we must also acknowledge that the Song's 'literal meaning', its most obvious sense, shares a fully convertible identity with the most profoundly hidden dimensions of its spiritual meaning.

If the foregoing analysis is correct, how does it come to pass that Origen develops two continuous readings throughout the great *Commentary*—a literal and a spiritual? Origen, after all, speaks in the *Commentary* (1) of the 'letter' (*littera*), 'story' (*historia*), and 'drama' (*drama*) of the Song and of a corresponding interpretation that is 'literal' (*literalis*), 'historical' (*historica*), and 'dramatic' (*dramatis*); (2) of a 'spiritual sense' (*sensus spiritalis*) or a 'spiritual and mystical' (*spiritalia et mystica*) meaning; and (3) of a movement from the 'literal' to the 'spiritual': *secundum litteram, secundum spiritum; littera ad spiritum; secundum litteram: ut exsequi possimus intelligentiam spiritalem.*[50] If Origen indeed judges the 'spirit' and the 'letter' of the Song really to be identical and means to carry this through

[49] 'What Does "Literal Meaning" Mean?', 500–1.

[50] For citations of (1), (2) and (3), see Crouzel, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques* ii, supplementary note 9 ('Les sens de l'Écriture'), *SC* 376. 758.

methodologically, we might expect him to develop only a mystical reading.

Let us examine the matter more closely. Rather than looking at the question in light of Origen's language of 'literality'—which, in any case, has probably slipped as much in Rufinus' translation here as it often has done in contemporary renderings of *On First Principles*—we shall instead consider it in view of Origen's actual reading of the Song's so-called *sensus literalis*. Immediately, an unusual fact becomes apparent. Origen develops the literal sense itself as a continuum of spiritual, 'bodiless', and superhistorical conceptions. In other words, when he examines the Song's 'literal sense', he finds something much akin to what he would identify as the spiritual or mystical sense in other scriptural writings.

The 'literal sense' as spiritual in the Song of Songs

Something of the spiritual assonance that Origen confers on the literal sense of the Song can immediately be seen in his reading of certain dramatic exclamations and utterances as explicit philosophical teaching. For example, Song 1: 8 ('Unless you know yourself, O good [*or* fair] among women . . .')[51] becomes a précis of Solomon's teaching on self-knowledge.[52] Indeed, Origen insists that in this teaching Solomon, who anticipated the Greeks 'in time and in wisdom and the knowledge of things', is the true source of the Delphic (and Socratic) admonition to 'know thyself' (*scito teipsum*).[53] Or again, Origen reads 'Order charity in me' (Song 2: 4b)[54] as the Bride's plain request—addressed to the apostles, no less, notwithstanding the seeming anachronism—that they teach her the ethical science of the *ordo caritatis*, how to set her loves in their due 'order and measure' (*ordo et mensura*).[55]

[51] *Cant.* 2.5.1 (*SC* 375. 354): 'Nisi cognoveris te, o bona—sive pulchra—inter mulieres . . .'; NRSV: 'If you do not know, O fairest among women . . . .'

[52] *Cant.* 2.5 (*SC* 375. 354–78).

[53] *Cant.* 2.5.2 (*SC* 375. 354). The Latin represents Rufinus' translation of the Greek γνῶθι σεαυτόν, more familiarly rendered in the Ciceronian form as *nosce teipsum* (*Ep. ad Quint.* 3.6.7).

[54] *Cant.* 3.7.1 (*SC* 376. 548): 'Ordinate in me caritatem'; NRSV: '. . . his intention toward me was love.'

[55] *Cant.* 3.7 (*SC* 376. 548–64). This entire chapter of the commentary is dedicated to outlining the ethical pedagogy that the Bride has requested in the verse. In effect,

There are, however, even more explicit ways in which a mystical meaning already seems to be immanent in the 'literal sense'. First, *the dramatis personae presented in the 'literal sense' are spiritual, not historical or embodied, persons.* We might note, for instance, that Origen's reading simply takes the Bridegroom of the 'literal sense' to be Christ in his divine aspect. When the Bride longs for the 'kisses of [the Bridegroom's] mouth' (Song 1: 2a), she 'betakes herself to prayer and makes supplication to God, whom she knows to be her Bridegroom's Father' (*convertat se ad orationem et supplicet Deo, sciens eum Patrem esse sponsi sui*).[56] In other words, the Bridegroom of the 'literal sense' is one and the same as the divine Son of God, since God is his Father.

Similarly, the Bride of the 'literal sense' is all the while a spiritual being. When the Bride speaks of her blackness (Song 1: 6a, 'Do not gaze at me because I am darkened; for the sun has looked down on me'),[57] Origen interprets her words asomatically, yet as part of the 'literal sense': 'and thus she shows that she is not speaking of bodily blackness, because the sun is wont to tan or blacken when it looks *at*, and not when it looks down *on* anyone.'[58] Likewise, when the Bride speaks in Song 1: 6b, Origen implies that the reader cannot reasonably construe her words in a bodily way: 'She . . . now makes this further statement that her mother's sons fought not against but *in* her . . .' (*filii matris suae dimicaverunt non contra eam, sed in ea* . . .).[59] The Bride's brothers cannot be locally present 'in' her after a bodily sense; their conflict,

then, Origen has set about fulfilling the request that the Bride has addressed to the apostles themselves. We must appreciate how closely Origen has assimilated his pedagogical work to the apostolic ministry; for it demonstrates that he assumes some correspondence to exist between his own relationship, as teacher, to the reader (mystically incorporated into the Bride's life) and the relationship of the Bride-church to the apostles.

[56] *Cant.* 1.1.3 (*SC* 375. 178).

[57] *Cant.* 2.1.1 (*SC* 375. 298): 'Ne videatis me quoniam infuscata sum ego, quia despexit me sol'; NRSV: 'Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me.'

[58] 'In quo ostendit non de nigredine corporis fieri sermonem, quod utique sol infuscare et denigrare solet, cum respicit magis quam cum despicit', *Cant.* 2.2.2 (*SC* 375. 248).

[59] *Cant.* 2.3.1 (*SC* 375. 316).

therefore, must be spiritually interior to her life, and 'that is the story of the play before us' (*haec est propositi dramatis fabula*).[60]

At some points in the *Commentary*, Origen brings the spiritual nature of all the characters into view. For example, in reference to Song 2: 1–2 ('I am the Flower of the field, etc.) Origen writes, 'it seems that He, who is at once the Bridegroom and Word and Wisdom (*haec ille qui sponsus et Verbum et Sapientia est*), says these words about Himself and the Bride to His friends and companions.'[61] If the Bridegroom appears here as 'Word and Wisdom', then the Bride, friends and companions can scarcely be any less spiritual than he.

Second, *the actions and events of the 'literal sense' occur in spiritual, not diachronic, history*. For example, when the Bride has petitioned God the Father for the presence of her divine Bridegroom, no time passes from the moment of her request to the moment it is fulfilled: 'While she is thus praying to the Father, she is ready to add . . . some further words of prayer, and to say that, even as she began to utter those words, the Bridegroom was present and standing by her as she prayed . . .'[62] The Bride's prayer is answered in and through its very formation. Her spiritual longing evokes, and indeed is, the presence of her Beloved. This mode of co-inherence is possible, on Origen's terms, only in the intellectual/spiritual order. Yet paradoxically, it undergirds a pivotal moment in what Origen identifies as the literal sense of the text: 'so much in passing for the literal meaning (*haec interim secundum historicam intelligentiam*) which, as we said before, is woven in the form of a play'.[63]

Elsewhere, Origen remarks upon the persistent discontinuity—the lack of coherence (*akolouthia*)—in the 'literal sense' of the Song, a condition that forces him to seek its whole meaning in the spiritual order. Commenting, for example, on the difficulty of fixing the literal sense of Song 2: 9b–13b, Origen describes himself as a man in search of elusive prey: 'For sometimes it happens that when the hunter, following a hot trail, thinks that he has come close to the hidden lairs,

[60] *Cant.* 2.3.1 (*SC* 375. 316).

[61] *Cant.* 3.4.1 (*SC* 376. 516).

[62] 'Dumquat haec orat ad Patrem, in ipsa oratione . . . parat etiam alia orationis verba subiungere ac dicere quia in hoc principio sermonis affuisse sponsus et oranti ei adstisse . . .', *Cant.* 1.2.1 (*SC* 375. 190).

[63] *Cant.* 1.2.2 (*SC* 375. 192).

he is all of a sudden forsaken by the track marks.'[64] Origen's homely analogy is evocative and exact. The 'hunter' is the exegete; the 'quarry' and 'hidden lairs' are spiritual meanings and their places of concealment; the 'hot trail' is the 'connection that exists among spiritual realities' (*τὸν ἐν τοῖς πνευματικοῖς εἱρμόν*);[65] the 'track marks' are the *pneumatika* themselves.

Third, *the literal sense depicts only spiritual realities, not sensible things*. For example, when the literal sense finds the Bride inside the King's chamber ('the place of feasting and wisdom'; *locumque convivii ac sapientiae*), Origen explains, it reveals that 'she has beheld therein the victims and the wine bowl mingled in His mysteries' (*in eo victimas et craterem mixtum sacramentis eius adspexit*).[66] The eucharistic topos of Origen's expression is obvious. But it is equally plain that he cannot be speaking of a physical bowl with fermented wine, for this *krater* contains the *mysteria* of the Bridegroom. Its character, like that of the mysteries mingled in it, must be spiritual.

Origen also attributes extraordinary properties to objects and substances named in the literal sense of the Song. We find an interesting illustration in his reading of the text 'My spikenard has yielded its (or His) odour' (1: 12b).[67] He explains the meaning: 'in some marvellous way (*ac miro quodam genere*) the spikenard, scentless so long as it was with the Bride, yielded its odour when it touched the Bridegroom's body; with the result, apparently, not that He has received something from it, but rather that the spikenard has received something from Him.'[68] In other words, the spikenard mentioned in the literal sense of the Song possesses the 'marvellous' property of drawing its scent wholly from the 'body' (*corpus*) of the Bridegroom. Likewise, of course, the Bridegroom's 'body' must also have this rare scent to impart to the ointment. Thus, neither this ointment nor the body that it anoints are physical things; their wonderful qualities can only be divine.

[64] *Cant.* 3.14.1 (*SC* 376. 656) = Lawson (3.13), 229.

[65] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336).

[66] *Cant.* 3.8.1 (*SC* 376. 568).

[67] 'Nardus mea dedit odorem suum—sive odorem eius': *Cant.* 2.9.1 (*SC* 375. 436); NRSV: '... my nard gave forth its fragrance.'

[68] *Cant.* 2.9.1 (*SC* 375. 436).

Previous assessments of the 'literal sense' in Origen's reading of the Song of Songs

To date, no studies of the great *Commentary* have taken notice of the peculiar spiritual character that Origen attributes to the *sensus literalis* of the Song. In fact, most have construed it in quite the opposite way—namely, that Origen builds his reading upon a conventional, historically grounded 'literal sense' that he must subsequently sacrifice to achieve his 'bodiless' exegesis. Crouzel, for example, suggests that in Origen's twofold (literal and spiritual) exegesis of the Song 'le sens donné par l'Esprit est considéré par lui comme spirituel ou allégorique et distingué d'un sens littéral qui ne représente pas l'intention de l'auteur, mais la matérialité même de ce qui est dit . . .'.[69] K. Torjesen gives a similar explanation of the problematic 'literal sense' in the *Commentary*:

> [For Origen] the spiritual meaning is dependent on and developed from the historical or concrete reality to which the text refers, rather than the grammatical sense of the text itself. It is the historical reality behind the text . . . the literary-dramatic situation (the love drama of the Song) which contains the figurative representation of the spiritual reality, not the naked text.[70]

D. Dawson, likewise, suggests that the literal sense imputed by Origen to the Song is a 'first story' from whose materiality the reader must depart in order to reach the 'second story' of the spiritual sense. He writes:

> The allegorical reader's necessary departure from the first story of Scripture parallels that reader's resistance to the fall of her soul, away from contemplation of the logos into body, history and culture. The equally necessary reliance of the second story on the first story's 'literal sense' parallels that reader's redemptive use of her soul's embodiment . . . For Origen, allegorical reading is the peculiar literary form taken by the soul's effort to love through its embodiment as both fall and redemption.[71]

[69] Introduction to *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques* i. 19.

[70] *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 141. Corney ('What Does "Literal Meaning" Mean?', 501) takes much the same position as Torjesen, even after having begun to move towards acknowledging the spiritual character of Origen's 'literal' reading of the Song: 'For Origen the literal level of the text is the story-line of the the drama, the dialogue of its characters.'

[71] 'Allegorical Reading . . . in Origen', 26.

Dawson's position is the most promising of the three. For it not only preserves the 'necessary reliance' of the 'spiritual sense' upon the 'literal sense' in Origen's reading but also recognizes that, in some sense, Origen perceives the Song as being uniquely representative of the whole exegetical process.[72]

Yet, like Torjesen and Crouzel, Dawson thinks that Origen ascribes to the 'literal sense' of the Song a 'body' that must be negated or set aside, even as one uses it as a stepping-stone to the spiritual sense. We have already examined Crouzel's confusion over the status of the 'materiality' in 'bodiless' texts like the Song. Dawson, for his part, sees a use but not a meaning in the asomatic 'literal sense' of Origen's *Commentary*. On Dawson's view, Origen thinks that the 'literal sense' is really latent in the Song, yet only as that which must be overcome in the soul's agonistic triumph over its own fleshly attachments. Why this should make the Song a 'bodiless' text, Dawson never tries to explain. And, in any case, Origen explicitly denies that the Song contains even the 'least trace of a corporeal connotation'.

Finally, according to Torjesen, Origen always develops the spiritual sense of a text from a 'historical or concrete reality'. This hypothesis, of course, raises the question of why Origen should read the Song—or any other text, for that matter—as 'bodiless' in the first place. More than this, since Origen must on Torjesen's reading posit behind the narrative of the Song a figurative (i.e. imaginatively 'sensible') 'literary-dramatic situation', he would seem to be caught in the impossible position of having to read the Song somatically and asomatically in the same moment. Yet again, the spiritual reading of this supremely asomatic text is perceived as a negation of an underlying 'bodiliness' that, Torjesen thinks, is somehow really present as a shadowy background to the spiritual reading.

[72] I disagree with Dawson on the matter of precisely how Origen sees the Song as a representative text. Whereas Dawson thinks he sees it as uniquely embodying the problem of exegesis (i.e. the struggle with the materiality of the 'letter' to attain the 'spirit'), I suggest that Origen views the Song as representative of the answer to that problem. For Origen, the very 'letter' of the Song already 'embodies' the decisive departure from bodily conceptions and, as I shall argue in Chapter 4, when seen in the underlying *logos*-unity of the text ultimately re-presents the proper end of exegesis—the Logos personally present as 'spirit'.

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF 'BODILESS' TEXTS

The 'bodiless' text as transfigured 'letter'

To understand how Origen can understand a 'bodiless' text like the Song to be more than a mere negation of an obvious literality, we must embark upon a fuller inquiry into his doctrine of 'bodiless' texts in general. The discussion will clarify how it is that Origen can conceive of the 'bodiless' Scripture as the highest actualization of the potencies latent within words and texts. On the basis of the foregoing discussion in this chapter, we can already infer a great deal more about the attributes of a 'bodiless' text. The *logoi* of such a text will be structured in such a way that they can bear no 'obvious meaning' (τὴν πρόχειρον ἐκδοχήν).[73] The most rudimentary understanding of such a text must begin by laying aside the limitations of historicity or sensibility in the 'letter' and rise immediately into the higher senses. Such texts, as D. Turner percipiently observes, will be 'cracks in the surface of the literal meaning' that let the light of the 'spirit' pass through its constituent *logoi* unfiltered.[74]

Where, then, does Origen think the 'letter' or the 'literal meaning' of such asomatic texts has gone? Turner suggests that, for Origen, it is 'missing altogether'.[75] His opinion, however, altogether ignores Origen's positive hopes for the redemption and conversion of corporeality and material being. We must acknowledge, of course, the recalcitrance of Origen's theological conception of the physical body—especially the human body. Yet, as Crouzel observes, this difficulty does not arise from any intention to undermine the integrity of the body but, rather, from the magnitude of his vision of the body itself: 'La doctrine origénienne du corps est complexe et nuancée, difficile à saisir dans sa totalité . . . le corps glorieux des ressuscités, le corps éthéré des anges, ou, dans l'hypothèse de la préexistence, celui des intelligences primitives, sans parler du corps obscur des démons.'[76]

[73] *Princ.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 310). [74] *Eros and Allegory*, 111. [75] Ibid. 110.
[76] *Virginité et mariage selon Origène*, 44.

Nevertheless, largely because of its difficulty, this doctrine has acted as a lightning-rod for the most diverse criticisms of Origen's entire outlook on anthropology and salvation.[77] The history of such criticism begins most famously with Jerome's unsubstantiated but enduring charge that Origen empties all corporeality (in particular, the resurrection body) of its permanence and significance,[78] and remains lively in the general modern consensus that Origen excludes the body's material potencies from the final state of salvation.[79] Indeed, so pervasive are these suspicions that even Crouzel finds himself obliged to concede that Origen manifests a real 'pessimisme' towards the corporeal flesh, a pessimism couched in 'ambiguïtés' that nonetheless conceal, he implies, a certain ameliorating element.[80]

What, then, are these hopeful ambiguities? According to Crouzel, they lie in the double sense that Origen imputes to the word ἀσώματος, to denote, on the one hand, 'invisible' or purely spiritual natures that bear no material properties whatsoever, and on the other hand, bodily natures of an extremely attenuated materiality.[81] Crouzel suggests that in his efforts to conceive of our ultimate deification in God's absolute 'bodilessness', Origen allowed the former sense of *asômatos* to overshadow the latter and thus arrived at the confused idea that the body's

[77] On Origen's doctrine of the body, especially the resurrection body, as focus for efforts to discredit his orthodoxy, see M. Edwards, 'Origen No Gnostic; or, On the Corporeality of Man', *JTS* 43 (1992), 26–31.

[78] *Ep. ad Avitum*, 124.5 in *Epistulae*, ed. I. Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 54–6 (Leipzig, 1910), iii. 101–3.

[79] e.g. C. Blanc, 'L'attitude d'Origène a l'égard du corps et de la chair', *SP* 17.2 (1982), 843–58. In 'Prime Matter in Origen's World Picture', *SP* 16:2 (1985), 260–3, P. O'Cleirigh contends incorrectly that Origen employs the notion of ὕλή only to account for the metaphysical structure of the visible world; thus matter and bodies are evidence of the very 'discontinuity' between the invisible and visible that must be overcome at the resurrection. An appreciation of the soteriological role of the body and matter in Origen—as locus of moral struggle and medium of reward—might have suggested to O'Cleirigh a more integrated, 'continuous' view of corporeality vis-à-vis spirit.

[80] *Virginité et mariage selon Origène*, 44.

[81] For ἀσώματος as 'invisible', see *Princ.* praef. 8–9 (*SC* 252. 84–8) and as 'rarified body' or 'spiritual body', see *Princ.* 1.7.2 (*SC* 252. 208–12) and 3.6.5–7 (*SC* 268. 244–50). Edwards ('Origen No Gnostic', 24) also notes Crouzel's attention to the seeming ambiguity of *asômatos*.

final glorification[82] is also its final annihilation. For Crouzel, the hope in this scheme lies in the possibility that the two senses of *asômatos* might be disentangled, thus sustaining rather than dissolving the paradox implied in the expression 'spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15: 44).

Yet, Crouzel's solution gives too much to Origen's detractors, for it already assumes there is a problem where in fact none exists. Origen himself is well aware that 'spiritual body' suggests a paradoxical coinherence of contraries.[83] Nowhere, however, does he resist the paradox;[84] indeed, he identifies the 'glory of the "spiritual body" ' (*gloria corporis spiritalis*) as our final eschatological state: 'into this condition (*in hunc statum*), therefore, we must suppose that the entire substance of this body (*omnem hanc nostram substantiam corporalem*) of ours will develop at the time when all things are restored and become one and when "God shall be all in all"'.[85] Thus, Origen can imagine that even the physical body will eventually lay aside its corruption, not so as to go 'missing altogether' but to assume by participation the glory of the 'spirit' (i.e. as 'spiritual body'). How much more, then, might Origen understand the 'body' of Scripture—which is already an intelligible 'mode of understanding'—to be susceptible to an analogous transformation?

The next section of our discussion will therefore argue that in Origen's 'bodiless' texts literality has not been negated but rather has been transfigured, raised to an altogether higher register where 'letter' and 'body' now share fully in the asomatic quality of the 'spirit'. The *logoi* of the 'bodiless' text makes the spiritual depths of Scripture available in pure immediacy. To grasp this insight will be essential to appreciating how Origen thinks that the Song imparts its

[82] The only contrary evidence appears in hostile sources like Jerome (*Ep. ad Avitum*) and Justinian (*Ep. ad Mennam*, see *GCS* 22. 118), which Koetschau's edition has nevertheless inserted into the text of Rufinus; see e.g. *Princ.* 2.3.3 (*GCS* 22, frag. 19).

[83] *Princ.* 3.6.5 (*SC* 268. 246). On the resurrection of the body as a 'transmutation to a finer state' through the absorption of divinizing 'qualities', see Edwards, 'Origen No Gnostic', 24; Crouzel, 'La thème platonicien du "véhicule de l'âme" chez Origène', *Didaskalia* 7 (1977), 230.

[84] Edwards ('Origen No Gnostic', 26–37) shows definitively, I think, that Origen not only never questions the permanent and essential character of our corporeality but, in fact, labours hard to create a reasonable philosophical account of ὑλή, μορφή, εἶδός, and ὑπόστασις so as to show how the body's final glorification of form might be realized.

[85] *Princ.* 3.6.6 (*SC* 268. 246).

mysteries to the reader—as a 'drama' of 'mystical utterances' which is played out on the soul's stage in the act of reading itself. The most important implications of this discussion for appreciating Origen's view of the Song, however, will only be explored in the last two chapters of this study. For the moment we must concern ourselves with establishing how Origen thinks 'bodiless' texts are constituted and capable of imparting their higher meanings.

Identifying the 'bodiless' text

'Bodiless' texts serve the salvific aim that underlies all Scripture. As we observed earlier, what is for Origen so 'wondrous' about the words of Scripture is that they speak at two registers simultaneously: the 'spirit' for those who can receive it, the 'letter' for those who need it. Thus even the 'letter'—the small and limited aspect of the text—shares deeply in the reasonableness and power that flow from the 'spirit' of the *logos*. The letter's participation in the spirituality of the *logos* is the source of its salvific usefulness for the neophyte.

In fact, Origen thinks, the 'letter' with its divinely rational order is so very useful, so very accommodating to the discursive habits of the ordinary intellect, that without some sort of divine *reveille* the soul might take its ease in the 'letter' indefinitely.[86] This 'wake-up call' comes in the form of what *On First Principles* identifies as 'stumbling-blocks' (*σκάνδαλα*) in the text. Origen explains:

But if the usefulness of the law and the sequence and ease of the narrative (*τὸ τῆς νομοθεσίας χρήσιμον . . . καὶ τὸ τῆς ἱστορίας ἀκόλουθον καὶ γλαφυρόν*) were at first sight clearly discernible throughout, we should be unaware (*ἠπιστήσαμεν*) that there was anything beyond the obvious meaning (*παρὰ τὸ πρόχειρον*) for us to understand in the Scriptures. Consequently the Word of God has arranged for certain stumbling-blocks (*σκάνδαλα*), as it were, and hindrances and impossibilities (*προσκόμματα καὶ ἀδύνατα*) to be inserted in the midst of the law and the history, in order that we may not be completely drawn away by the sheer attractiveness of the language

[86] Here, then, Origen recognizes that the pleasure of the scriptural text holds the power to beguile the reader; as much for Origen as for Plato, then, the interpreter always stands in danger of becoming the hunted as much as the 'hunter' of meanings. See *Sophist*, 231D and *Symposium*, 203D, cited in Edwards, 'Gnostics, Greeks, and Origen', 73.

(ἵνα μὴ πάντῃ ὑπὸ τῆς λέξεως ἑλκόμενοι τὸ ἀγωγὸν ἄκρατον ἐχούσης), and so either reject the true doctrines absolutely, on the grounds that we learn from the Scriptures nothing worthy of God, or else by never moving away from the letter fail to learn anything of the more divine element (μηδὲν θειότερον μάθωμεν).[87]

Certain scriptural passages bristle with impossibilities in the literal sense. Consequently, neither their 'usefulness' (χρήσιμον), 'ease' (γλαφυρόν), nor even their proper sense may be sought intelligently in what would otherwise comprise the 'obvious meaning'—the 'body'—of the text. These 'stumbling-blocks', then, cause the reader to trip cognitively, 'prompt[ing] a different kind of seeing'[88] and compelling him to seek the text's obvious meaning at an altogether higher level, where the 'more divine element' (θειότερον) resides.

How will the reader recognize such 'bodiless' texts? According to *On First Principles*, some 'bodiless' texts will posit an incongruous or impossible juxtaposition of two physical things or acts (e.g. Jesus viewing the 'kingdoms of the whole world' from a high mountain; Paul's 'thorn' in the flesh), which we then understand must refer to spiritual things or acts. Or, second, other 'bodiless' texts may be recognized through an obvious difference—though not opposition—between the materiality of the figural *logos* (i.e. its sensible meaning) and the spiritual reality that is plainly meant by it (e.g. 'tree of life'; 'face of God').[89] With either kind of 'bodiless' text, Origen presupposes that a prior analogy already exists between those earthly things that the *logoi* of the text would ordinarily denote and certain spiritual 'realities' (πράγματα) which, in the extraordinary case of the 'bodiless' text, they exclusively denote.

Every analogy, of course, presumes a difference in kind between two beings or acts. In the *Commentary on the Song*, Origen explains that the difference—indeed contrast—between things of heaven and earth is that the latter are fleeting while the former endure. The *Commentary on the Song* describes this difference by comparing the nature of the 'inner human' and the 'outer human': 'Of these two men [Moses] tells us that the one, namely, the inner man (*unum, id*

[87] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336).

[88] P. Cox Miller, ' "In My Father's House Are Many Dwelling Places": κτίσμα in Origen's *De principiis*', *ATR* 62:4 (Oct., 1980), 335.

[89] See esp. Origen's catalogue of such examples in *Princ.* 4.3.1–3 (*SC* 268. 342–56).

est interiorem), is renewed (*renovari*) from day to day; but the other, that is, the outer (*id est exteriorem*), he declares to be corrupted (*corrumpi*) and weakened (*infirmari*) in all the saints and in such as he was himself.'[90] Both Genesis and Paul figure in Origen's scheme. The *homo exterior* (2 Cor. 4: 16) or physical body is 'formed of the slime of the earth' (Gen. 1: 26 f.) and perishes with all the transitory things of the earthly order to which it belongs.[91] By contrast the *homo interior* or soul represents, metonymically, the whole inward and spiritual part of the double creation.[92] Since it is made 'in the image and likeness of God' (Gen. 1:26),[93] it not only bears an intellectual character but also an immortal one, inasmuch as it is 'renewed from day to day' (*renovari per singulos dies*) by God's ever-creative act. The contrast between incorruption and corruption is nearly total, and Origen finds it writ large in the structure of the rational and material creations.[94]

Yet, even this contrast is not truly absolute. In *On First Principles*, Origen explains that all created spirits, though not corporeal or visible in themselves (thus, *asômaton*; *invisibilis*),[95] nevertheless are necessitated to an embodied way of life.[96] Though superior to bodily

[90] *Cant.* prol. 2.5 (*SC* 375. 92–4).

[91] *Cant.* prol. 2.4 (*SC* 375. 92).

[92] The most complete discussion of the human being as 'double creation' appears in H. Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, Théologie 34 (Paris, 1956), 54 f., 148–53.

[93] LXX: '*ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν ἡμετέραν*'. According to Origen only the soul is created in the 'image and likeness' of God, while the body is 'the image of earthliness' (*εἰκών τοῦ χοϊκοῦ*: see *Jo.* 20.181 (*SC* 290. 246)). Although some scholars have pressed Origen's distinction between the *κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ θεοῦ* and the *εἰκών τοῦ χοϊκοῦ* to a point where they seem to stand in opposition to each other (see A. J. Hobbel, 'The *Imago Dei* in the Writings of Origen', *SP* 21 (1989), 302–3), Origen in fact means these distinctions to point to the difference-in-participation that pertains between God, the human soul, and its body. For Origen, the matter of the earthly body bears a 'form' (*εἶδος*) that is the image of the soul, which itself shares participatively 'in' the unique Image of God (i.e. the Logos as *Εἰκών*). Human beings are not *εἰκόνες* but *κατ' εἰκόνα*; see *Jo.* 2.19–33 (*SC* 120bis. 224–32); *Cels.* 4.85 (*SC* 136. 396) and 6.63 (*SC* 147. 334–8). Again, the definitive study of Origen's *imago dei* theology remains Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène.*

[94] For Origen's other major discussion of the two human beings, see *Dial.* 15–24 (*SC* 67. 88–103).

[95] *Princ.* 1.7.1 (*SC* 252. 206–8).

[96] '… ut quoniam necesse erat uti corporibus intellectualem naturam …', *Princ.* 4.4.8 (*SC* 268. 422).

substance, these created spirits—including the 'inner human', angels, the astral spirits, and the World Soul[97]—not only animate their bodies but express their character through them. The body and the created spirit depend upon each other, the body for its form and dignity, the spirit for its expression as a discrete self.[98] While Origen has frequently been accused of denying the perpetuity of the resurrection body, the doctrine of the resurrection holds out the promise that the body may eventually possess a 'more glorious form' (*gloriosius*),[99] the 'corruptible' being clothed with 'incorruption when a perfect soul, instructed in the doctrines of incorruption, has begun to use it' (... *induet incorruptionem, cum perfecta anima et dogmatibus incorruptionis instructa uti eo coeperit*).[100]

Thus, in the cosmos, corporeality and spirituality are joined together in an intimate union that amounts to the 'greatest kinship':

> For the visible holds the highest relationship with the invisible, as the apostle says, 'The invisible is perceived from the creation of the world through things that were made'. Therefore ... 'the visible and invisible', earth and heaven, soul and flesh, body and spirit have mutually this kinship and this world is a result of their union ... [101]

On one side, then, a dynamic, created union bridges the distance between heaven and earth, spirit and body. On the other side, this distance is spanned by the uncreated, ideal, and eternal exemplar (i.e. the Logos and the *logoi* of the eternal creation) in whose image all things spiritual and material are created.[102] Out of these two kinds of relations—a created relation of dynamic union and an uncreated

[97] See *Princ.* 1.5 (*SC* 252. 174–94); 1.7–8, 2.1 (*SC* 252. 206–44).

[98] In the resurrection, the Christian's soul will become the 'clothing' (*indumentum*) and 'ornament' (*ornamentum*) of the body, 'covering and concealing its mortal nature' (*celans et contegens eius mortalem naturam*); see *Princ.* 2.3.2 (*SC* 252. 252). Likewise, the 'rational creature' cannot live apart from some body—whether physical or spiritual—inasmuch as the soul requires the matter of the body both to express its mutability and to receive the qualities.

[99] *Princ.* 2.3.2 (*SC* 252. 254).

[100] *Princ.* 2.3.2 (*SC* 252. 252).

[101] *Hom. in Lev.* 5.1 (*SC* 286. 204–6) = *Philoc.* 1.30 (*SC* 302. 230–2), tr. Barkley, 89.

[102] See Miller, '"In My Father's House" ', 323–30. To Origen's mind, the created union between the inner and outer creations is itself an image of the uncreated relationship between the Logos and the uncreated intelligibles (i.e. his *epinoiai*). The mystery of both the Incarnation and the final restoration (*apocatastasis*) is, for Origen, the assumption of the created union ('earth') into the uncreated ('heaven').

relation of likeness in the Word—there emerges a similitude that secures a real continuity between heavenly and earthly *pragmata*. It is this complex similitude that makes scriptural *analogy* possible as the foundation of the *anagogical* ascent from 'letter' to 'spirit'.

The 'bodiless' text in the context of the universal economy of signification

In Book III of the *Commentary on the Song*, Origen explains that just such a relationship of ontic similitude exists between every material being and some 'invisible pattern' in whose 'likeness' it is:

> Each of the manifest things (*unumquodque eorum quae in manifesto*) is to be related to one of those that are hidden (*sunt referatur ad aliquid quae in occulto sunt*); that is to say, all things visible (*singula quaeque visibilia*) have some invisible likeness and pattern (*singula quaeque visibilia habere aliquid similitudinis et rationis ad invisibilia*) . . . all these hidden things can be understood and deduced from the things that are seen (*quae tamen ex his visibilibus intellegi possunt et conici*).[103]

Similarly, a few pages on, Origen writes that:

> . . . all the things in the visible category that can be related to the invisible (*cuncta secundum ea quae praefati sumus ex visibilibus referri possunt ad invisibilia*), the corporeal to the incorporeal (*a corporalibus ad incorporea*), and the manifest to those that are hidden (*a manifestis ad occulta*); so that the creation of the world itself, fashioned in this wise as it is, can be understood through the divine wisdom, which from actual things and copies teaches us things unseen by means of those that are seen, and carries us over from earthly things to heavenly (*a terrenis nos transferat ad caelestia*).[104]

Origen teaches here that God has ordered the cosmos as a universal economy of signification, insisting very strongly that the principle of similitude extends universally throughout the whole visible world: 'each of the manifest things' (*unumquodque eorum quae in manifesto*), 'all things visible' (*singula quaeque visibilia*), 'all the things in the visible category' (*cuncta . . . ex visibilibus*).

[103] *Cant.* 3.13.16, 20 (*SC* 376. 633–4, 36) = Lawson (3.12), 220–1.
[104] *Cant.* 3.13.27 (*SC* 376. 640) = Lawson (3.12), 223.

Conversely, Origen also teaches that each of the heavenly intelligibles (i.e. exemplars subsisting in the Logos as members of the 'eternal creation'), without exception, manifests its nature in some class of corporeal beings: 'all these hidden things can be understood and deduced from the things that are seen' (*quae tamen ex his visibilibus intellegi possunt et conici*). The 'all ... hidden things' of which Origen speaks is truly universal, embracing the visible and invisible *elementa mundi*, things 'which no times nor ages can comprehend' (*quod nulla possunt tempora, nulla saecula*), 'things that are going on now' (*haec quae nunc sunt*) and 'the perfecting and consummation of the whole' (*perfectionem consummationemque universitatis*).[105] Thus the mirror of the visible world captures, as image, the invisible world's every detail and, manifesting that image to the soul, leads the soul 'over from earthly things to heavenly' (*a terrenis nos transferat ad caelestia*).

We see, then, that Origen posits an exhaustive, one-to-one correspondence between heaven and earth. Every earthly reality has its exemplar, and each heavenly prototype has its this-worldly reflection to which it is related as both its formal and its exemplary cause. Because of this universal economy of signification, Scripture can use the same word to denote heavenly and earthly analogues. Just as there are two orders of reality but only one Logos (with his *logoi*) who unites heaven and earth, so are there two orders of meaning in Scripture (i.e. 'body' and 'spirit'), named and imparted by the same body of *logoi*. Origen calls these words, fittingly, *homonyms*:

> The thing we want to demonstrate about these things is that the Divine Scriptures make use of homonyms (*homonymas*); that is to say, they use identical terms for describing different things (*per similes appellationes, immo per eadem vocabula*). And they even go so far as to call the members of the outer man by the same names as the parts and dispositions of the inner man; and not only are the same terms employed, but the things themselves are compared with one another.[106]

Scripture is wholly made up of names or terms that, considered apart from any particular context, point simultaneously to both a heavenly

[105] *Cant.* 3.13.18 (*SC* 376. 634), 3.13.20 (*SC* 376. 634–6) = Lawson (3.12), 221.
[106] *Cant.* prol. 2.6 (*SC* 375. 94).

and an earthly referent. Thus there is no word and hence no notion in Scripture that fails to embrace these polarities of heaven and earth, the spiritual and the corporeal. All the possible (true) meanings of a *logos* arise in the creative tension between them. Consequently, Origen will find a created analogue even for terms that are properly reserved to uncreated spiritual realities, even for God himself.[107]

The hermeneutical basis of 'bodiless' signification in the Song of Songs

Accordingly, and notwithstanding its 'bodiless' character, the meaning of the Song, like that of any other Scripture, is founded upon the use of homonyms. Origen establishes this fact in his discussion of the 'roe' and 'young hart' of Song 2: 9:

If, therefore, in accordance with the principles that we have now established all things that are in the open (*igitur si omnia quae in manifesto sunt*) stand in some sort of relation to others that are hidden (*ad aliqua referuntur quae in occulto sunt*), it undoubtedly follows (*consequens sine dubio est*) that the visible hart and roe mentioned in the Song of Songs are related to some patterns of incorporeal realities (*referantur ad aliquas rerum incorporalium causas*), in accordance with the character borne by their bodily nature (*secundum rationem naturae suae, quam corporaliter gerunt*).[108]

Imprinted 'bodily' (*corporaliter*) in every 'visible hart and roe', he explains, is a 'character' (*ratio*) that stands in a real relation to 'patterns of incorporeal realities' (*rerum incorporalium causas*). By examining the nature of the material creature, we can begin to discern the complex intersection of characteristics that finds its specific incorporeal exemplar in the Logos of God.

In the course of such an analysis, which is more a contemplative penetration, we begin to discover not only the intelligibility, the *logos*, that undergirds the created being but also, at the same time, the *logos*

[107] *Cant.* prol. 2.34 (*SC* 375. 114): 'To take another example, the word "God" is used primarily of Him "of whom are all things, and by whom are all things, and in whom are all things"; so that it declares plainly the virtue and nature of the Trinity. But by a secondary and so to speak improper usage Scripture describes as gods those to whom the word of God came, as the Saviour affirms in the Gospels.'

[108] *Cant.* 3.13.30 (*SC* 376. 640) = Lawson (3.12), 223.

that permeates and is the biblical name. For Origen, these *logoi* (i.e. in the creature and in the name) are in fact identical. Behind the Platonic exemplarism in evidence here, Gögler sees the contours of a 'Semitic mentality', inasmuch as Origen understands there to be a real concrescence of the exemplar in the revealed *logos* itself.[109] Thus, in the scriptural name or *logos* Origen beholds a real epiphany—and not merely a particular instantiation—of a divine intelligible.

We turn again to the particular case of the Song of Songs in Origen's 'bodiless' interpretation. For every name or *logos* used in the Song, and hence for the text as a whole, Origen upholds just such a real coinherence of material thing (*pragma sōmatikon*), word (*logos*) and spiritual reality (*pragma pneumatikon*).[110] The same is true in all other 'bodiless' texts. None of their *logoi* may in principle be separated from either a heavenly or an earthly referent.

Nevertheless, we must remember that when Origen speaks of the 'visible hart and roe mentioned in the Song of Songs', he means only the earthly beasts to which these biblical *logoi* usually refer when they are used in a 'bodily' sense. But, as we know, Origen will insist that no name used in the Song is 'body', only 'soul' and 'spirit' (i.e. anagogy and finality). Hence, in the specific context of the Song, the words 'hart' and 'roe' speak only and exclusively of the spiritual realities whose character these animals bear in their 'bodily nature'. In the act of reading the Song, the Christian sage ought to have so surpassed somatic cognition that not even the least trace of untransformed materiality should contaminate his imagination when he comes upon the names 'hart' and 'roe'.

Nevertheless, in Origen's judgement, it is always a positive knowledge of the earthly hart and roe that prepares the soul, by a pedagogy in the truths of nature, to comprehend the Song's metaphysical 'hart and roe'. In the order of intellectual discovery, human knowledge of divine realities grows from the knowledge of mundane ones. In knowing and beholding their innate intelligibility or *logos*, the Christian prepares himself to receive the written *logos* that refers only, for

[109] *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes*, 220.

[110] Dawson ('Allegorical Reading in Origen', 28–30) compares Origen's hermeneutical use of *pragma* to its use as a synonym for *lekta* in Stoic logic, the categories of which Origen himself occasionally employs in his own analysis of the exegetical process.

example, to the exemplary 'hart' and 'roe' and on the basis of this knowledge to see these exemplars in the divine Logos himself. The material seed, nourished by God's light, bears fruit in a purely spiritual comprehension of the *causae* through which all creatures exist.

THREE SUMMARY POINTS AND QUESTIONS

We arrive now at three conclusions that will prove crucial to our ongoing discussion of Origen's 'bodiless' reading of the Song:

All 'bodiless' texts retain a vital connection with the sensibility and corporeality of the 'letter'. For Origen, all scriptural texts whether somatic or 'bodiless' are compounded of *logoi* that represent the dynamic, analogical union that pertains between spiritual and corporeal beings. That is to say, all *logoi* in principle comprehend both 'letter' and 'spirit'. In somatic texts, the reader must usually pass from 'letter' to 'spirit' through a subjective procedure described by Origen (with specific reference to the Jewish tabernacle) as 'rightly attaching the word of Scripture (τῆς γραφῆς . . . τὸν λόγον) to the particular idea of which the tabernacle (i.e. as the corporeal being) is a type (τύπος)'.[111] In the 'bodiless' Scripture, by contrast, this same anagogical process is in force, save for the crucial difference that the 'right attachment' of *logos* to spiritual idea has already occurred objectively in the original composition of the text itself. The correspondence between purely corporeal notions and increasingly spiritual ideas is preserved in the 'bodiless' text; but the movement from one to the other—from the lower to the higher—is decisively relegated to the past.

The 'letter' of the 'bodiless' text has not simply disappeared but has converged with and terminated in the 'spirit'. In *On First Principles*, Origen refers to the 'body' of Scripture as the 'obvious meaning' (τὴν πρόχειρον ἐκδοχὴν) of the text.[112] A 'bodiless' text, however, is

[111] ὅσον δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ, τῷδέ τινι ἀξίως τῆς γραφῆς ἐφαρμόζειν τὸν λόγον, οὗ ἐστι τύπος ἡ σκηνή, *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 302).

[112] *Princ.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 310).

not one which does not possess an obvious meaning. Rather, it is one in which the criteria of obviousness have shifted to a level where the 'simple' (*haplousteroi*) cannot yet perceive the text's real transparency to 'spirit'. In the 'bodiless' text, then, the 'spirit', with all the anagogical modalities leading to it (i.e. 'soul'), stands forth as the plain sense of the text. For example, in referring to certain 'bodiless' passages that describe only the anatomy of the 'inner human', Origen writes, 'It is perfectly clear (*evidenter ostenditur*) that in these passages the names of the members can in no way be applied to the visible body, but must be applied to the parts and powers of the invisible soul. The members have the same names, yes; but the names plainly and without any ambiguity (*aperte autem et sine ulla ambiguitate*) carry meanings proper to the inner, not the outer, man.'[113] There is, in other words, an 'obviousness' in which the 'letter' shows forth the 'soul' and 'spirit' plainly and without any shadowy, unredeemed corporeality—yet without ever losing its character as 'letter'.

The interconnected logoi *of the 'bodiless' text make higher realities present in pure immediacy.* For Origen, somatic Scriptures consist of *logoi* that, in the first instance, function as signs (σημεῖα; *signa*), names (ὀνόματα; *nomina*), or types (τύποι; *figurae*) of sensible realities. These realities, with all their interconnections, in turn act as mental signs that mediate the reader's knowledge of the corresponding spiritual realities or events.[114] In these texts, therefore, the reader moves at last into the ascending path of higher meanings only through a series of intermediate steps external to the spirituality of the *logoi*. The *logoi* of the 'bodiless' text, by contrast, lead the reader immediately into spiritual *noeta*. These conceptions are not external to the *logoi*. They are rather the increasingly ramified yet (paradoxically) unified 'modes of understanding' or intelligibility latent in the *logoi* themselves. In the 'bodiless' text, then, the reader steps directly into an order of signification wholly interior to the intelligibility of the *logoi*. The *logoi* as intelligibles themselves become the field in which the hunter searches out the wild hart of the 'spirit'. Or, to shift metaphors, the *logoi* and they alone are known to be the soul's

[113] *Cant.* prol. 2.11 (*SC* 375. 100).

[114] See esp. Dawson's discussion of this process of inference by signs in 'Allegorical Reading in Origen', 32.

nourishment. Thus, for example, 'that food' (*ille cibus*) meant for the 'perfect' is provided 'in the words of the Song of Songs (*in verbis enim Cantici Canticorum*)'.[115] It is, therefore, through these spiritual and intelligible realities made present in the *logoi* that the soul ascends stepwise; the end of its journey is to reach the supremely intelligible reality of the divine Logos in whom all these *logoi* subsist as his names and his manifestations.

Each of these conclusions applies equally to all 'bodiless' texts whatsoever, not exclusively to the Song. Yet Origen does set the Song apart from other 'bodiless' texts in one crucial way: it is the only biblical book which, taken as a whole, partakes of this 'bodiless' character. The whole book—what Origen calls its 'whole body'—has no somatic or historical bearing whatsoever: 'So the Song of Songs is simply Solomon's; it belongs neither to the Son of David, nor to Israel's king, and there is no suggestion of anything carnal about it (*neque aliqua prorsus in his miscetur carnalis nominis intelligentia*).'[116] We shall visit this important text again in Chapter 5.

In light of these particularly expansive horizons to which Origen broadens the Song's 'bodilessness', we may ask three questions in view of the conclusions developed above.

(1) If all 'bodiless' texts stand in continuity with the corporeality of the 'letter', then what is the status of the nuptial and erotic sensibility of the Song of Songs in Origen's exegesis?

(2) If the 'bodiless' text ordinarily shows forth both the 'soul' leading towards the 'spirit' as well as the 'spirit', might Origen think it possible that some extraordinary biblical text could be organized in such a way that it shows forth the 'spirit' alone?

(3) If 'bodiless' texts comprise nothing but *logoi* that show forth various limited perfections of the divine Logos, is there a 'bodiless' text to which *logos* is present in such a way that the divine Logos is revealed in his absolute perfection?

The next chapter will take up the first of these questions; later chapters, will consider the second and third. I shall aim, first, to demonstrate that Origen has not developed his 'bodiless' reading of the Song out of a negation of nuptial love or sexuality in the sacred

[115] *Cant.* prol. 1.3 (*SC* 375. 82).
[116] *Cant.* prol. 4.21 (*SC* 375. 162).

text. Rather, I shall argue, the rationale for his exegesis is hermeneutical to the core (see Chapter 3). Indeed, it is so rigorously hermeneutical—as we shall discover in Chapters 4 and 5—that it leads Origen to make the strongest conceivable claims possible for any text. Keeping in mind all the preceding discussion, we turn now to investigate Origen's motive for reading the Song of Songs as an asomatic book.

2
Origen, the Nuptial Motif, and the Song of Songs

ORIGEN AGAINST THE SEXUAL BODY?: THE NEGATIVE CRITIQUE OF ORIGEN'S 'BODILESS' READING OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Why does Origen read the Song of Songs as 'bodiless' text?

Why does Origen read the Song of Songs as a 'bodiless' text—as a book that excludes the very 'corporeal' element that he recognizes to be common to almost all other scriptural texts? This question speaks not to the issue of psychological motivation but rather to that of hermeneutical motive. For, as we have seen, Origen will always identify some textual anomaly, some incongruity, that renders a somatic reading not only untenable but incomprehensible. What, in other words, are the judgements that lead Origen to interpret the Song with such a thorough allegorism, a spiritualization that extends to every aspect and dimension of the text?

The answer given will decide for the reader what Origen understands the Song most essentially *to be*, and in light of this identity, what function he believes it *to perform* in the sacred canon. For, where Origen would discern only higher meanings (e.g. 'seek only for the soul and the spirit') in a scriptural text—a passage or, as is uniquely true for the Song, a whole book—he will search out God's reason for excluding a 'corporeal' meaning. In other words, the exclusion of the 'body' of Scripture—which is really the infusion of the bodily character of the letter itself with the properties of intelligibility and 'spirit'—is never haphazard but, on the contrary, reflects both the aim (*skopos*) of the text and the meanings (*boulêmata*) made manifest in it.

The shape of the negative critique

Contemporary opinion regards Origen's 'bodiless' reading of the Song above all as a complex evasion of a physical eroticism that is, it is supposed, essential to the real meaning of the text. Thus in much of the literature we may observe a tendency to confine discussion to a single—and generally uncriticized—judgement: that the ascetical drift of Origen's theology prevents him from discerning any kind of revelatory purpose in the Song of Songs' representations of conjugal love, without first thoroughly removing the action of the text from a corporeal to a spiritual order. In other words, Origen allegorizes the Song because he cannot otherwise reconcile the sensuality of the text with the spiritual meaning that it must be understood also to impart.

On this view, Origen's hermeneutical problem with the Song—how to preserve its authentic erotic tenor and teaching while rising above bodily conceptions—springs from a theological or even psychological aversion to sexual love, pleasure-taking, and embodied desire that together form what is supposed evidently to be the plain sense of the text. Or, expressed more severely, the difficulty that Origen faces in the Song is thought to proceed, in the final analysis, not merely from a suspicion of embodied *erôs* but from a moral repudiation of it. In turn, this repudiation requires him not only to distinguish bodily and spiritual loves (ἐρώτες) but, more radically, to separate them into mutually opposed orders. His spiritualization of the Song comes to be seen not only as *noncorporeal* but as radically *anticorporeal*. His approach to its 'literal sense', then, appears on this interpretation to be fundamentally negative, an erasure of an unseemly physical spectacle to make possible a sublime spiritual vision.

Origen has, of course, always been suspected of deep dualisms. Ever since Adolf von Harnack sought to expose his theology as a sterile hybrid of biblical language and Greek thinking, mainstream interpretations have consistently approached Origen as though he were like the Mixed King of Goethe's *Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*—a figure of imposing strength and beauty, yet

weakened through and through by a fissure of imperfect ore. A. Nygren, to take one example, describes what he thinks to be the resulting tensions in Origen's whole theological enterprise:

[Origen] will surrender nothing of Christianity, and in a far higher degree than Clement he can be described as a biblical theologian. At the same time, he is a Platonic philosopher. This dual strain, however, means that he not only, as often supposed, pours the content of the Christian faith into Greek moulds, but he produces a real religious synthesis. Origen, in fact, lives his religious life in both of the two rival spiritual worlds.[1]

For Nygren and the scholarship that he represents, the 'dual strain', which apparently permeates every aspect of Origen's thought, is held to be the compromising influence of philosophical (i.e., Platonic or, more exactly, Middle Platonic) dualism, with all its suspicions of the body's power to weigh the soul down in a mire of passions and distractions.

There are notable exceptions to this tendency represented by Nygren,[2] and some scholars have dedicated whole careers to the resuscitation of Origen's good name as a catholic biblical theologian, a 'man of the Church' (*ἄνηρ ἐκκλησιαστικός*).[3] Yet, even deeply sympathetic studies of his theology will often fall back on his supposed dualism for an easy way through problems that might, in fact, require a different solution. For instance, after surveying texts in

[1] A. Nygren, *Agapê and Erôs*, tr. P. S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1982), 369.

[2] For example, C. Blanc ('L'attitude d'Origène', 847–54) argues convincingly that Origen's understanding of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and hence his conception of the moral and ascetical praxis of Christians (i.e. 'the saints'), demonstrates as much a critical Christian response to Greek philosophy as an adaptation of—or to—it.

[3] See Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis*, 305–21; and de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 47–91 ('Origène, Homme d'Église'). In particular, the collected writings of H. Crouzel represent the most thorough and determined effort to restore Origen's standing in the church and the academy, an effort that has been more rewarded by other Catholic scholars than by the magisterium itself (from personal interview with Père Crouzel, May 8, 1996 in Toulouse). It should be noted, however, that by soft-pedalling any Platonic influence in Origen (see esp. *Origène et la Philosophie* (Paris, 1962))—as well as the systematic elements in his theology—Crouzel has risked domesticating this often daring thinker whose 'errors', to quote W. R. Inge, 'are more instructive than [a] docile orthodoxy' (*Origen*, Proceedings of the British Academy, v. 32, 22 ff.). Trigg remarks, 'The prestige of Crouzel's views has made Origen appear in much current scholarly writing as a very safe, respectable—and dull—theologian' (*Origen: the Bible and Philosophy*, 284, n.1).

which Origen suggests a certain mutual exclusivity between prayer and sexual activity, J. José Alviar offers this opinion on Origen's whole attitude towards marriage:

The incompatibility of marriage with the ideal of exclusively spiritual activities is thus a second negative aspect of marriage according to Origen. The conflict lies deep in the Alexandrian's mind, which is drawn by opposed tenets: one of a more philosophical character, which views man from a too-spiritual angle; the other a Scripturally-based idea, which sees the possibility of 'continuous prayer'.[4]

Alviar, it should be noted, tries to be fair by measuring such 'negative aspects' of married life as this against other 'positive aspects'. But his pluses-and-minuses methodology already belies, while simultaneously confirming for himself, the two underlying assumptions that he makes explicit in this text: (1) that Origen's mind is torn by a profound bifurcation (e.g. the deep-lying 'conflict', 'drawn by opposed tenets'); and (2) that this division arises from his stake in unscriptural principles that he took from Platonic philosophy (e.g. a 'too-spiritual', 'philosophical' tenet vs. 'a Scripturally-based idea').[5]

An even stronger tendency to pit Origen against himself on the subject of marriage, sexuality, and *erôs* can be seen among scholars who, unlike Alviar, do not sense any conflict in his mind on questions of the bedchamber. In their view, Origen sets sex and desire apart as foci of uniquely intense moral disdain. P. Brown, for example, suggests that Origen has bracketed the sexual act as the one discordant note among the many harmonies of Christian nuptial life:

As a social institution, the partnership of the married couple—their intimacy, their loyalty to each other, the ordered and benevolent hierarchy of husband and wife . . . —struck Origen as valid symbols of the invisible concord of a redeemed creation. But even they were transient symbols. As for the facts of the marriage-bed, there was something pointedly 'inapposite'

[4] *Klêsis*, 167. See also P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London, 1988), 173.

[5] The test case in Alviar's text is the explanation that Origen offers as to why Paul should advise sexual abstinence during periods of intense prayer (1 Cor. 7: 5). Alviar produces persuasive evidence that Origen supposes it an 'impossibility' for a man to render worthy prayers to God and, at the same time, worthily fulfil his marital duty. Alviar has identified one of Origen's more conservative texts on marriage but fails to explain why Origen might think that the marital duty is incompatible with prayer.

about them. No amount of decorum could smooth away the incongruities associated with it.[6]

Whereas Alviar situates Origen's biblical–philosophical conflict in a tension within his conception of sexual love in its relation to the whole of married life, Brown locates it between sexual love and all the other aspects of married life. Origen's view of marriage, Brown suggests, subjects the unity of Christian nuptial life to a radical deconstruction into symbolic and anti-symbolic ('inapposite') spheres.

For Brown's Origen, the symbolic order embraces the whole public reality of the married couple, which points to harmony, concord, and redemption. By contrast, the private unities of sexual congress hold no such promise of higher things. Even in its transience, the social hierarchy of husband and wife represents heavenly 'order', 'concord', and 'redemption'. Their sexual union, however, is inapposite, indecorous, incoherent, incongruous. Vitiated not only by transitoriness but also by an inherent moral and symbolic discord, the acts of the marriage bed are shameful deeds, empty of moral worth, and closed off existentially and analogically from divine realities.

These sorts of widespread presentations of Origen as deeply conflicted over matters of body, sexuality, and *erôs* lend credibility—and perhaps deeper conviction—to those who would root Origen's 'bodiless' reading of the Song in an uncompromising negation of its sexually charged literal sense. N. Bishop, for example, selects Origen's spiritual exegesis of the Song as the case study for her argument in 'Denial of the Flesh in Origen and Subsequent Implications'.[7] What Bishop puts forward as Origen's 'denial of the flesh' becomes, as the title of her article suggests, the root of his denial of a 'literal' meaning in the Song of Songs. Expressions of this point of view abound in her discussion: 'The negative attitude toward the body was evidenced throughout the ten books of this monumental commentary...';[8] 'the designation of the nature of this passion is clearly delineated in Platonic terms to glorify the spiritual and debase the physical...';

[6] *The Body and Society*, 17.

[7] *Mystics Quarterly* 14:2 (June, 1988), 70–83.

[8] 'Denial of the Flesh in Origen', 70. Obviously, Bishop's opinion represents only informed conjecture, since only three books and a portion of a fourth are extant.

'Origen typically selects the meaning . . . which will mask any erotic suggestion.'[9] All the elements of the standard account are here—Origen's scorn of the body, the 'Platonic' dualism of spiritual good and physical evil, the element of 'cover-up' in his exegesis—and combine to make of his whole reading of the Song a life-negating inversion of the text.[10]

It is a hopeful sign when Bishop observes that other reasons might support a purely allegorical reading of the Song. For instance, Origen might have turned to a solely spiritual reading when faced with a biblical book, like the Song, that carries no obvious religious teaching. Bishop is arguably correct to reject this as Origen's real motive for reading the Song as 'total allegory'. But rather than searching out other, perhaps more penetrating, rationales for Origen's way of reading the Song, she turns immediately for an explanation to his alleged dread of the body and its sexual appetite.

A particularly acute expression of this kind of answer appears in the work of W. Phipps. Phipps sees in Origen's spiritualizing of the Song not only the application of a body-negative theology but also the symptom of a pathological disgust for physical sexuality. In this vein, then, he writes:

> When he was young he took literally Jesus' hyperbole about cutting off bodily members that cause one to sin, and thus he castrated himself. Later in life he took too figuratively the Song of Songs and rejected its literal meaning. Eunuch Origen was sure that God never intended the book to be understood except as a purely spiritual drama of the inner life.[11]

As Phipps sees matters, Origen's 'rejection' of the Song's literal meaning is equivalent to a figurative castration of the text, cognate to his alleged physical castration.[12] But Phipps' rhetoric has outpaced

[9] 'Denial of the Flesh in Origen', 70–1.

[10] Blanc assesses Origen's ascetical theology more favourably, acknowledging both its high regard for even the fallen human body and its fruition in Origen's own life of heroic sanctity: 'Un tel témoignage a-t-il encore quelque chose à nous dire?'. See 'L'attitude d'Origène', 852–4.

[11] 'The Plight of the Song of Songs', *JAAR* 42 (Mar., 1974), 87. See also Phipps' correspondingly one-sided and sometimes caustic discussion, *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition* (New York, 1986), 147–51; chapter entitled, 'Origen the Eunuch'.

[12] A similar parallel is drawn by Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation*, 115.

caution, not only because the historicity of Origen's castration is a moot question—and open to more congenial interpretations than-Phipps' even if one allows that Origen submitted to this procedure—but because his rush to infer Origen's motive for spiritualizing the Song leads him into rather simplistic psychological moralism.[13]

Nevertheless, Phipps' reading does set forth, if reductively, the underlying perspective in which so much contemporary scholarship believes Origen to ground his 'bodiless' reading of the Song. Origen's exegesis is seen to be a hermeneutical ruse that permits him to sustain the biblical authority of the Song, and even to raise it to the highest dignity, without undergoing the change of mind and heart that an honest and open reading would require of him. Yet, if correct, this account of Origen's 'bodiless' interpretations has the most serious implications for every level of his exegesis. For a wholly anticorporeal reading of the Song—or even a reading based on a simple negation of sexuality and embodied *erôs*—would topple Origen's 'bodiless' reading of the Song of Songs from the hermeneutical foundations that he lays for all other asomatic texts.

Problematic implications of the negative critique

First, *Origen would have undermined the analogical basis of meaning in the Song of Songs.* The opinion just surveyed implies that the Song's intelligibility must be placed on foundations entirely different from the rest of Scripture, whether somatic or asomatic. Origen will be seen to have marked off the Song by parentheses, making the whole text an exception to one of his most basic hermeneutical principles—the principle of analogy, of the 'universal economy of signification'. Having supposedly erased the similitude between corporeal and spiritual nuptialities, Origen can scarcely be thought to sustain the continuity-in-difference characteristic of an analogical relation. Hence, the erotic, nuptial *logoi* of the Song—and the underlying

[13] Bishop, to her credit, rejects this connection between physical castration and hermeneutical figuration for precisely the reason that it is a flat-footed attempt to reduce Origen's entire hermeneutical project, with its outcome in a 'too figurative' reading of the Song of Songs, to a pathology.

logos that is its formal unity of sense—simply could not be rendered intelligible on the basis of a prior pedagogy in the language and meaning of embodied human love. In other words, since there exists no analogy in essence between these two nuptialities, there can be no analogy in language between them either. The *erôs*-language of the Song could only bear an equivocal relationship to the ordinary language of love.

Second, *Origen would have negated the possibility of an anagogical reading of the Song of Songs*. If Origen has torn the Song from its hermeneutical foundations in analogy, then it must follow that he has invalidated any truly anagogical approach to the text in the same stroke. Indeed, since anagogy is but *epinoia* applied in the direction of the 'spirit' of Scripture, it must follow that in reading the Song the ordinary movement of the human mind towards truth must itself be suspended. Not only would the Song have no 'body'; it would have no 'soul' either.

Third, *Origen would have introduced a hermeneutical incoherence into the reading of the Song of Songs*. Given the previous two considerations, it will be no surprise that beneath Origen's allegory will be perceived an incoherence, one which E. A. Matter describes as 'the tension between the eroticism of the body and the eroticism of words and concepts'.[14] For the language in which the Song presents the divine nuptials is, on Origen's reading, precisely the language of embodied human *erôs*. Hence, it would appear that Origen's spiritual reading of the Song must assume a prior knowledge—prior both chronologically and logically—of the self-same physical eroticism to which it is opposed. An irreducibly carnal knowledge, therefore, would seem to be forever entangled with a spiritual understanding of the Song of Songs. The 'specter of corporeal bliss'[15] haunts the wedding-chamber of the Spirit.

Fourth, *Origen would allow the Song of Songs no positive relevance to the married life*. It would mean, finally, that what the Christian reads in the Song has no bearing upon the married life. Nor, conversely, ought earthly marriage, *erôs*, and sexuality inform the reader's interpretation of the Song. Far from seeing in the Song the

[14] *The Voice of My Beloved*, 33.

[15] *The Voice of My Beloved*, 33.

most sublime literary presentation of that 'perfect mystery' which is the exemplar of Paul's 'great mystery' (Eph. 5: 32) of earthly marriage, Origen's Christian should (it is supposed) understand the Song's 'perfect mystery' only through a negation of marriage love. Likewise, he will read the Song as a negation of marriage love. If the Christian should seek in the Song a vision of the proper end of nuptial love, he will find that end only as termination, not as completion and fulfilment.

The implications of this point of view for Origen's reading of the Song are enormous, as they indeed are for his total view of *erôs* and nuptiality. For, if correct, it means not only that Origen understands the Song to be built upon a hermeneutical anomaly. It also means, more problematically, that this anomaly is intrinsic to the nature of physical *erôs*, sexuality, and nuptial love *as such*. Thus Origen would have no alternative but to read the Song as a text without a 'body'. For the chasm that divides a 'bodily' reading of the Song's 'names of love' (*nomina caritatis*) and their true spiritual object (i.e. the union of Bridegroom and Bride) is engulfed by an even deeper abyss that yawns between the being of embodied love and the nuptial realities of heaven.

If this foregoing view of Origen's reading of the Song were correct, the modern reader would have every legitimate cause to reject its principal features not only as dubious but as positively dangerous to the incarnational principle at the heart of Christian sacraments, morality, and spiritual life. The implications for the theology and praxis of Christian marriage would be especially ruinous. Yet some scholars have recognized the great need to reassess Origen's reading of the Song in light of the hermeneutical principles that undergird his entire exegetical project.

For example, D. Dawson, in a penetrating essay, represents the dualizing account of the *Commentary* and *Homilies* as the 'great temptation'. Not only does 'such a dualistic and hierarchical scheme' pit 'spirit against letter and sublimated against unsublimated love'; it also 'misses Origen's essential point about the unity of the text and the unity of the reader's *erôs*.' He continues:

Origen faces a specific hermeneutical dilemma in his commentary on the Song of Songs: he must find a way to read a text about physical love so that it

becomes a text about a spiritual love that can be understood only through a form of reading that is itself an enactment of spiritual love. Yet the spiritual love that is both impetus to, and reward of, allegorical reading, while not carnal, must also not be disincarnate. Achieving a spiritual love that is neither carnal nor disincarnate is parallel to discerning an allegorical meaning that is neither 'literalistic' nor 'anti-literal'.[16]

Widespread opinion supposes, of course, that Origen exclusively values a love that is 'disincarnate' and so develops a reading of the Song that is 'antiliteral'. Dawson, however, sees the fundamental flaw in this view. Namely, it unreflectively supposes that Origen has removed embodied human love from the analogical order, out of which he derives all other spiritual signification and figuration in the Scriptures. This account, then, makes his Song exegesis to be the great exception to his hermeneutical principles, whereas, Dawson argues, Origen actually understands it to enshrine them in a superlative way.

In spite of a very promising beginning in his article, Dawson goes on to argue, implausibly I think, that Origen preserves a certain 'bodily sense' as precisely that element of the text which must be overcome through a loving attachment to spiritual goods. Nevertheless, Dawson's fundamental insight holds good: Origen's spiritual reading of the Song cannot simply be world-negating and disincarnate. It is, after all, in the *Commentary on the Song* itself that Origen sets forth his all-embracing hermeneutical view of existence (i.e. the universal economy of signification). Yet Origen never suggests that human marriage, physical sexuality, or embodied *erôs* themselves do not participate in analogical structures of meaning that undergird every other aspect of the Song. It would seem unlikely that, with his vigilance to exclude any hint of human marriage or physical sexuality from the action of the Song, he could have failed to have considered their place in the *logos*-order of creation, which is the basis of all spiritual meanings in the sacred text.

Hence we are not surprised to see that even when Origen turns to read the Song 'bodilessly', he does not seem to be driven by the censor's zeal. In fact, overt attempts to turn the reader away from a sexualized reading arise in the *Commentary* and *Homilies* only infre-

[16] 'Allegorical Reading in Origen', 27–8.

quently. This may explain why, when Phipps tries to explain the first of only two putative examples of what he describes as 'denatured ... sexual sentiments'[17] in Origen's reading of the Song, he is forced to misrepresent both Origen's exegesis and his motives. We shall turn for a moment to look at this example more closely.

Phipps takes the following illustration from Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Bride's 'black' colouration (Song 1: 5–6). Phipps' leading intuition about this text seems to be reasonable, at least in light of his premises: if the denial of erotic corporeality were paramount in Origen's spiritualization of the Song, one should expect to find this denial strongly exemplified in his interpretation of the Bride's black body. For in the 'bodiless' dialect of the Song, so the Prologue of the *Commentary* explains, the Bride's 'body' denotes her whole 'inner human' with all of its soul faculties, members, and organs.[18] The Song thus presents this 'body' as the focus of the Bridegroom's desire and the instrument of the Bride's 'burning *erôs*' for her beloved, whereby she 'longs to be admitted to union with him' (*mulierem amore viri alicuius ardentem cupientemque in consortium eius adscisi*).[19] It is not only the means of the Bride's union with Christ but also the instrument of inward carnality ('there is one [kind of] love, known as carnal ... according to which the lover sows in the flesh')[20] and, more deeply, of spiritual adultery with demonic powers of error and wickedness: 'this spiritual love of the soul does flame out (*exardescit ... hic spiritalis amor animae aliquando quidem*) ... sometimes towards certain spirits of evil (... *erga aliquos spiritus nequitiae*)'.[21]

[17] 'The Plight of the Song of Songs' 88.

[18] *Cant.* prol. 2.9–11 (*SC* 375. 98–100).

[19] Origen's (perhaps unexpected) candour—with this image of love as a sexual burning and longing—is not confined here to the order of spiritual love, for in fact Origen is using the example of some earthly 'woman' (*mulier*) and her sexual *erôs* as an analogy for the Bride and the fervent love that directs and conforms her mind and life to the Bridegroom's will. Thus the congruence between heavenly and earthly *erôs* remains intact here.

[20] '... aliquis carnalis amor ... secundum quem qui amat, in carne seminat', *Cant.* prol. 2.16 (*SC* 375. 102).

[21] *Cant.* prol. 2.19 (*SC* 375. 104). On the theme of spiritual adultery as (*a*) primordial error (of Adam and Eve), see *Hom. in Ez.* 7.6 (*GCS* 33. 396) and as (*b*) individual moral fault, see *Hom. in Ex.* 8.5 (*SC* 321. 260–6) and *Hom. in Num.* 20.1–2 (*GCS* 30. 185–91).

The 'body', in other words, designates the Bride's most intimate nature, with its potential for loves both true and false. And in Origen's reading of the Song, as P. Cox Miller has rightly argued, it is the figural reality wherein the notion of the flesh and its material 'bliss' react most intensely with the idea of the word and its intelligible 'bliss'—indeed, with the erotic *nature* of words as such, which kiss, embrace, penetrate, and impregnate the noetic body of the inner man.[22] Would not this reference to the darkened quality of the Bride's body, then, be most likely to receive from Origen a vigorous, anti-corporeal, anti-sexual reading?

Origen does not, in fact, fulfil these grim expectations. Certainly, the Bride's blackness denotes 'past transgressions' (*praecedentium delictorum*),[23] 'many sins' (*peccata plurima*),[24] a darkening 'with exceeding great and many sins . . . the inky dye of wickedness' (*qui nimiis et superabundantibus peccatis infuscatus est et atro malitiae fuco infectus niger et tenebrosus est redditus*).[25] Yet Origen never specifically identifies her blackness with that of 'carnal sin', as Phipps maintains that he does. Rather, he explains that her blackness is the gentile Bride-Church's ancient ignorance of divine teaching,[26] or its 'lowly origin' (*ignobilitas generis*).[27] And it is also the neglect and sloth that make that Bride-soul wither and harden (. . . *animae nigredo* . . . -*negligendo conquiritur, et* . . . *ignavia assumitur*)[28] before the scorching rays of the 'Sun of Justice', or it is her disobedience and unbelief (*inoboedientem et incredulum*).[29]

There is no suggestion in any of Origen's remarks that the Bride's sins are uniquely or even especially 'carnal'. Although he might intend to include corporeal or sexual sin among the Bride's eventual trespasses when she comes to inhabit a bodily nature of an earthly kind, this section locates the Bride's wrongdoing in her primordial

[22] See '"Pleasure of the Text"', 242 ff.

[23] *Cant.* 2.1.29 (*SC* 375. 276).

[24] *Cant.* 2.1.56 (*SC* 375. 292).

[25] *Cant.* 2.1.44 (*SC* 375. 286).

[26] *Cant.* 2.1.3–4 (*SC* 375. 262).

[27] *Cant.* 2.1.6 (*SC* 375. 264).

[28] *Cant.* 2.2.3 (*SC* 375. 298–300). The 'negligence' (*negligendum*) and 'sloth' (*ignavia*) of the gentile nations are the very same faults that, in their most extreme form, also caused the rational creation to lose its original integrity; cf. *Princ.* 1.4.1 (*SC* 252. 166–8).

[29] *Cant.* 2.2.7 (*SC* 375. 300).

nature, assimilating her darkness to the pattern of the first sin itself. Given the superhistorical character of the Song's narrative in Origen's reading, it appears that he thinks this wrongdoing to be the original sin and the Bride's darkness to be the despoilment of her primal beauty. The Bride's blackness can scarcely be the stain of a 'carnal sin' conceived in any narrow sense.

The remaining part of this chapter will undertake to show that the scholars just surveyed have, in fact, misidentified the ascetical motives, theological principles, and hermeneutical justifications in which Origen's 'bodiless' reading of the Song originates. They are, indisputably, correct to believe that a certain sexual scepticism and caution towards embodied *erôs* have influenced Origen's exegesis of the Song. However, in proceeding as though a sweeping negation of sexuality and passionate love have determined Origen's reading from the beginning, they fail not only to consider other more properly hermeneutical motives as central to his reading of the Song but also even to entertain the possibility that other such motives might exist. One need not look far to explain their lack of curiosity. Anyone who thinks that Origen's reading resolves at last into a jumble of anti-sexual, anti-erotic sentiments, mixed up with a Platonic suspicion towards the body, will be disinclined to seek out other, perhaps more fundamental, motives for this reading.

As a consequence, the aforementioned 'negative' readings of Origen's asomatic approach to the Song share an underlying methodological problem. None of them situates, or seems to think it important to situate, his reading within his total doctrine of marriage and his vision of the nuptial life—a surprising oversight, considering that these assessments of the *Commentary* and *Homilies* depend at one level or another on suppositions that can be correct only if Origen has either comprehensively negated the theological value of married love or suspended his usual theology of marriage when confronted with a Scripture of such immense sensuousness.

Origen's positive assessment of Christian marriage and sexuality

The most complete study of Origen's views on marriage, sexuality, and the several modes of chastity is H. Crouzel's magisterial *Virginité*

et mariage selon Origène. Briefer surveys of the same territory appear not only in Crouzel's *Origène* but also, very helpfully, in J. Alviar's *Klêsis: the Theology of the Christian Vocation According to Origen*.[30] Both Crouzel and Alviar strive to develop a balanced approach to what, even in the devastation of Origen's corpus, remains to us as a very ample teaching on the doctrine of marriage.

Both Crouzel and Alviar (who depends heavily on Crouzel for his primary evidence and interpretations) finally argue that Origen subscribes only to what might be called a 'weak view' of Christian marriage and its goodness—that nuptial life is merely not contrary to God's law rather than fully consonant with God's permissive will, underwritten by divine authority and sustained by grace for those called to it. My own research into the matter leaves me unconvinced of their conclusion, and some of my reasons for supposing that Origen holds Christian marriage—even in its sexual dimensions—in high esteem will emerge during the course of this chapter.

The principal weakness of both Crouzel's and Alviar's approach derives from their laudable efforts to be both comprehensive and succinct. As a consequence, however, they often neglect to give thorough consideration to the rhetorical context of certain of Origen's statements, which often greatly mitigates what otherwise appear to be negative judgements about the value of Christian marriage. For example, both Crouzel and Alviar give great weight to the following passage from *Homily 6 on Numbers*:

> Without affirming it in an absolute fashion, I am of the opinion that in certain common actions of men there are things which, being 'exempt' from sin (*quamvis peccato careant*), nevertheless seem to be unworthy (*non digna*) of the presence of the Holy Spirit. For example, legitimate marriages (*conubia legitima*) are exempt from sin, and nevertheless the moment in which the conjugal acts are accomplished (*tempore illo quo coniugales actus geruntur*), the presence of the Holy Spirit is no longer given, though it be a prophet who accomplishes the work of generation (*qui officio generationis obsequitur*).[31]

Crouzel and Alviar detect in this passage a view of marriage that stands in an unresolved tension with Origen's more optimistic

[30] *Virginité et mariage*, 132–69; *Klêsis*, 162–8.

[31] *Hom. in Num* 6.3.5 (*SC* 415. 152–4), tr. Alviar, *Klêsis*, 167 (emended).

appraisals of marriage and the marriage act. Alviar presents it as one of several 'difficult passages in which Origen mentions a certain indignity or impurity in marriage'.[32] Crouzel presents it as evidence that Origen 'ne pense que le Saint-Esprit préside aux relation conjugales'.[33] On their reading, then, Origen would seem to have decisively rejected the idea that the Holy Spirit superintends any aspect of the sexual activity of lawfully married Christians.

In fact, it seems that what Origen has in view in this text is not the conjugal act *per se* but rather the moment of sexual climax (*tempore illo quo coniugales actus geruntur*). This interpretation is supported first by the fact that Origen goes on to connect the *officium generationis* specifically with a particular 'human potency' (*vis humana*);[34] this last expression invokes his common use of *vis* to designate the natural 'power' to fertilize as well as the potency of human life latent within the father's seed.[35] Second, Origen links this deprivation of the Holy Spirit, curiously, with the work of prophecy ('even though it be a prophet who accomplishes the *officium generationis*').

What Origen has in mind here is the opposition between two kinds of psychological states: on the one hand, the clear and self-possessed *noêsis* of the prophets and, on the other, the loss of right reason characteristic of sexual climax. The true prophet, Origen insists in *On First Principles*, suffers no 'mental disturbance or aberration' (*obturbationem vel alienationem mentis*), while the false prophet is dominated by bad 'energies' (*energias*) that 'take whole and entire possession of the mind' (*cum penitus ex integro eorum possederint mentem*); he further explains:

[32] *Klêsis*, 167.

[33] *Virginité et mariage*, 143.

[34] *Hom. in Num.* 6.3.7 (*SC* 415. 156).

[35] For example, 'the forces of the field' (Song 2: 7 (Ruf.)—in *viribus agris*) becomes 'the things that have been sown' in the field of the soul, *Cant.* 3.10.2 (*SC* 376. 590); and, related, 'this song [i.e. the Song of Songs] is sung to [the Bride], now that she is grown up . . . and ready for a husband's power' (*virilis potentiae*), *Cant.* prol. 4.2 (*SC* 375. 146). The *vis caritatis* (*Cant.* 1.6.6 (*SC* 375. 254) = Lawson (1.5), 88) is, according to the Prologue, both the 'single love of the Word of God' (*solus Verbi Dei amor*) and the 'seed of the Word of God'(*semen quidem Verbi Dei*), *Cant.* prol. 2.46 (*SC* 375. 124). See also *Or.* 8.1 (*GCS* 3. 316–17), where Origen draws an analogy between the 'power needed for begetting children' and the power of prayer.

From this we learn to discern clearly when a soul is moved by the presence of a spirit of the better kind, namely, when it suffers no mental disturbance or aberration whatsoever as a result of the immediate inspiration and does not lose the free judgement of the will.[36]

According to Origen's text on the 'work of generation', then, even the prophet, who possesses a certain fullness of the Holy Spirit, cannot retain his spiritual equilibrium at the moment he is seized by the irrational force of orgasm.[37] On my reading, Origen's judgement touches neither marriage nor the sexual act in itself; his very restricted remark says only that the divine *charism* which sustains the unity of Christian spouses does not offset the fallen irrationality of sexual climax.[38]

Examples such as the preceding one can be multiplied. Nevertheless, the research of Crouzel and Alviar does at the very least suggest that Origen makes the three following judgements of marriage:

[36] *Princ.* 3.3.4. (*SC* 268. 192–4).

[37] Our reading is confirmed by Origen's theological horror at the orgasmic ecstasies of the sibyl, brought to oracular climax through a bizarre mode of copulation with demons, *Cels.* 7.3 (*SC* 150. 16–20). To Origen's mind, the perverse union between demon and sibyl—by which evil inspiration enters through the sexual organs—apes the wholly spiritual intercourse between the Holy Spirit and prophet and mocks the dignity of the sexual intercourse of Christian spouses, whose nuptial lives are no longer dominated by servitude to demons, *Cels.* 8.57 (*SC* 150. 302–4). See esp. A. Mehat, 'Divination païenne et prophetie chrétienne: La Pythie, Origène et Saint Jean Chrysostome', in *Origeniana Quarta*, 435–7. On 'fornication with demons' as a universal problem of sinful humanity, see S. Tavares-Bettencourt, *Doctrina ascetica Origenis seu quid docuerit de ratione animae humanae cum daemonibus*, Studia Anselmiana 16 (Vatican City, 1945), 102–8.

[38] Origen clearly teaches the presence of a marital *charisma*, which conjoins two believers—'equally-yoked' in Christ (on the issue of the *ἑτεροζυγοῦντες*, see H. Crouzel, *Virginité et Mariage*, 145–8)—in a permanent union and provides them with sufficient grace to create of their marriage a kind of *ecclesiola* (see *Comm. in Mt.* 14.16 (*GCS* 40. 324); *Comm. in I Cor.* frag. 34, *JTS* 9 (1908), 503). A fragment on Romans 1: 11–12 (*Comm. in Rom.* frag. 3, *JTS* 13 (1912), 213–14) implies that marriage partakes only of an 'unspiritual charism' (*χαρίσμα οὐ πνευματικόν*), because on his interpretation of Paul's counsel concerning occasional abstinence, sexual intercourse impedes prayer. Again, however, at issue for Origen is not marriage as such but rather sexual union within Christian marriage, or, more specifically, something experienced in sexual union that has the power to interrupt the soul's communion with God, namely, the disruptive force of orgasm. Remarkably, in any case, Origen has attributed to the whole movement of sexual intercourse between Christians a genuine charism—albeit not a spiritual one—that makes it coordinate to other great human goods, like wealth and glory.

(1) *Marriage is a lawful option for Christians.* Origen unambiguously establishes his belief in the consistency of marriage with God's provisional aims for Christians—a valid way of life in the Christian economy.

(2) *Marriage is a corporeal type of spiritual things.* Origen shows that God has marked genuinely Christian marriage with a theological character that empowers it to point as type to heavenly realities.

(3) *Marriage is a theological reality in its own right.* Origen leads the reader to appreciate the interior richness of the 'ineffable mysteries' of the Christian mysteries. Marriage is, for Origen, neither merely a natural evil that God tolerates nor merely a waystation on the way to better things. Christian marriage is a real instantiation of the 'perfect [nuptial] mystery'.[39]

In the conceptual movement that joins these three ideas, Origen represents an existential movement from earthly realities to Heavenly Reality. The conformity of the nuptial state to God's law points in type to the *perfectum mysterium* of Christ and his Bride whilst, at the same time, initiating spouses into that mystery in reality. This movement, then, is not one in which the earthly character of Christian marriage simply drops away as the liberated soul comes into view of the spiritual truth that marriage veils. Rather, this same spiritual truth—the union of Christ and his Bride as 'one spirit'—is also the immanent finality (*telos*) towards which the Holy Spirit is shaping the whole earthly, corporeal (i.e. 'one flesh') character of marriage even now.

We shall now turn our attention specifically to Origen's exegesis of the nuptial motif—marriage, sexuality, and *erôs*—as it arises throughout Scripture as a whole. Our aim will be to show that Origen consistently maintains an analogical continuity between spiritual realities on the one hand and, on the other, historical facts and biblical representations of nuptial life. This discussion will allow us to reach two conclusions: first, that Origen's 'universal economy of signification' holds good for marriage and nuptial life as well as for its scriptural representation; and second, and more crucially for this

[39] For 'lawful option', see Crouzel, *Virginité et Mariage*, 132–4; Alviar, *Klêsis*, 162–3. For 'corporeal type', see *Virginité et Mariage*, 30–9; *Klêsis*, 114–20, 164. For 'theological reality', see *Virginité et Mariage*, 142–5, 148–60; *Klêsis*, 163–5.

study, that reasons other than the Song's portrayal of embodied *erôs*, the marriage bed, and the delight of lovers must be sought to explain the 'bodiless' exposition that Origen brings to the text.

ORIGEN'S HERMENEUTICAL EVALUATION OF THE NUPTIAL MOTIF

Origen on the Scripture's 'principle of inclusion'

Even if Origen does perceive in embodied nuptial love (particularly in Christian marriage) a veridical image of the love shared by the divine Bridegroom and his Bride, he is in no way obliged to assume that God would wish to include sensible representations of embodied *erôs* in the Scriptures. Even given the innate goodness of nuptial life, its more intimate aspects—intensified by the great holiness of God's own Nuptial Reality—could, on Origen's terms, be justifiably numbered among those things about which Scripture maintains silence, not from shame, but from reverence and care.

Perhaps, then, Origen's reasons for excluding a corporeal meaning from the Song spring from his understanding of the limits defined by the didactic aims of Scripture as a whole. For even while he thinks Christian marriage to be a real good, he still thinks it to be a *transitory* good that must eventually make way for perfection—a perfection that is at once the Bride's final nuptiality *and* her nuptial finality. But it is precisely this perfection that the pedagogy of Scripture, even in its somatic and historical portions aims to form in the soul.[40] If it can be established that Origen thinks 'somatic' portrayals of nuptial life—especially in its sexual or erotic aspects and especially in the form of story, like the Song of Songs—will

[40] In connection with Origen's notion of divine σκοπός (aim) in Scripture, we have already seen that Origen thinks that God organized the 'secondary aim', underlying the narrative form ('body') of Scripture, to serve his 'primary aim' that endows Scripture with doctrinal content ('spirit'). Not only does this 'secondary aim' guarantee the structural, discursive identity of the Scripture's 'body' and 'spirit', but it also leads the fleshly mind, step by step, to a place where it can begin to see the 'spirit' hidden within the very 'body' that has led it to this vision. See *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 334–40), 4.3.5 (268. 362–4).

obstruct rather than foster the soul's advance to true perfection (as final nuptiality and nuptial finality), then his seeming erasure of the Song's 'body' might reasonably be accounted to his didactic concern for the soul's sanctification of mind and body.

Origen does not think that the inherence of real goodness and truth in a bodily sign is alone sufficient to qualify that sign for incorporation into the 'body' of Scripture. There is a 'gold' of words and teachings, Origen writes in the *Commentary on Matthew*, that is 'found outside the temple' of Scripture. Although good and valuable in its own order, this 'gold' still 'is not sanctified'. He continues,

> . . . in the same way every meaning, which is outside the divine Scripture (however admirable it may seem to some) is not holy, for it is not contained in the meaning of Scripture, which is wont to sanctify only the meaning that it has in itself, just as the temple sanctifies only its own gold.[41]

Origen cannot allow that any 'thoughts' (i.e. doctrines or theoremata), even those that might be relatively 'admirable' in themselves, truly share in the holiness of divine wisdom unless they have been sanctified through inclusion in Scripture.[42] The holiness of Scripture resides in its capacity to infuse holiness in the reader. And this process of sanctification occurs through the total spiritual pedagogy of the inspired Word (i.e. the Temple), consisting precisely in the coherent and progressive structure of its divine doctrines (i.e. the gold).[43]

[41] 'Sicut enim omne aurum, quod fuerit extra templum, non est sanctificatum, sic omnis sensus, qui fuerit extra divinam scripturam (quamvis admirabilis videatur quibusdam) non est sanctus, quia non continetur a sensu scripturae, quae solet eum solum sensum sanctificare quem habet in se, sicut templum proprium aurum', *Comm. ser. in Mt.* 18 (*GCS* 38. 32–3), my translation.

[42] Origen's hermeneutical distinction here between mere 'thoughts' (*sensus*) and thoughts which are 'holy' (*sancti*) is purposefully reminiscent of a more basic soteriological distinction he makes in *On First Principles* between 'all rational beings' (*omnes qui rationabiles sunt*) as 'partakers of the Word of God' (*verbi dei, id est rationis, participes sunt*) (*Princ.* 1.3.6 (*SC* 252. 154)) and those who are 'made holy' (*sancta efficiantur*) by 'participating in this grace [of the Holy Spirit]' (*participatione ipsius* [i.e. *gratia spiritus sancti*]), *Princ.* 1.3.8 (*SC* 252. 162).

[43] On the central role of Scriptural doctrines in sanctification, see *Princ.* 4.2.7 (268. 326–8), where Origen asserts that souls cannot 'otherwise reach perfection except through the rich and wise truth about God' as gained through a 'true understanding of the Scriptures'.

It is true that the excluded 'gold' that Origen specifically has in mind in the foregoing passage is that of philosophical teaching.[44] Yet, in other places, he opens the underlying principle even to doctrine taught at times under divine dispensation. For example, the *Commentary on the Song* itself distinguishes the 'true gold' (*aurum verum*) of the heavenly Tabernacle—spiritual doctrines concerning 'things incorporeal, unseen, and spiritual'[45]—from certain 'likenesses of gold' (Song 1: 11—*similitudines auri*), which denotes all the imperfect doctrines and bodily conceptions of the Law.[46] These 'likenesses of gold' do, in a complex way, symbolize all that belongs to the celestial realm. Nevertheless, only the 'true gold' finds a place in the heavenly Holy of Holies.

Does Origen, then, think that earthly marriage is an inferior 'gold' such as this, a 'likeness' that is good and even divine in its own order yet unsuited for typological use in service to the higher Temple of Scripture? The answer to this question lies with what he identifies as what might be called a 'hermeneutical principle of inclusion' at work in Scripture, a rule by which he measures the difference between the 'admirable gold' left outside Scripture and the 'holy gold' sanctified within it. This rationale for this rule is what Origen calls 'suitability' or 'usefulness' (ὠφέλεια).[47]

'Usefulness' *(ὠφέλεια)* and the contents of Scripture

According to Origen, 'usefulness' distinguishes doctrines and laws that are 'worthwhile' (χρήσιμος)[48] from those that are 'unprofitable'

[44] Origen is not opposed to the idea that Christians might make use of pagan learning, given sufficient caution of the sort that he urges upon Gregory Thaumaturgos, *Philoc.* 13.1 (*SC* 148. 186–8). To appropriate pagan philosophy as ancillary to scriptural learning is an example of what Origen describes metaphorically as 'spoiling the Egyptians' (cf. Ex. 12: 36), *Philoc.* 13.2 (*SC* 148. 188–90). Nevertheless, Origen is equally concerned to preserve the originality and primacy of divine Scripture, which he consistently assumes to be the historical source of the truth in pagan doctrine.

[45] *Cant.* 2.8.17 (*SC* 375. 416).

[46] *Cant.* 2.8.17 (*SC* 375. 416). Origen includes in his conception of Law not only (*a*) the cultic law of Israel but also (*b*) the natural law. Both of these modalities of Law originate in God's will, and the licitness of embodied nuptial life is secured under each. It is the bodiliness of this-worldly nuptial love that makes of it a 'likeness of gold'—but a 'likeness' nonetheless.

[47] *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 334). Torjesen (*Hermeneutical Procedure*, 124) has been the first to recognize the importance of 'usefulness' in Origen's hermeneutic.

[48] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 338).

(ἀνωφελής) to the Bible's readers.[49] As a consequence, conceptions that do not avail—that do not nourish or build up—find no place in the inspired Word; those that confer benefit in view of God's aims, by contrast, are embraced within its objectives. According to Origen, then, the specific difference of any text included in the Scriptures' unity is that it serves—is useful—to accomplish the ends intended by God. But, Origen thinks, Scripture fulfils God's ends specifically by helping human souls attain their end and fulfilment in God: 'Scripture... has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation (εἰς ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν)'.[50]

Ultimately, then, 'usefulness' denotes the coherence of all Scripture with the originating and primary 'aim' (*skopos*) of prophetic inspiration; that is, to help the spiritually minded (i.e. 'perfect') reader (1) 'become a participant in the whole doctrine of the Spirit's will' (κοινωνὸς τῶν ὅλων τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ γένηται δογμάτων)[51] and (2) 'obtain perfection' (τῆς τελειότητος τυχεῖν) through 'the rich and wise truth concerning God' (τῆς πλουσίας κ αὶ σοφῆς περὶ θεοῦ ἀληθείας).[52] Hence Scripture is useful not merely because it teaches truths *per se* but because it teaches a divine truth that fosters perfection in the soul 'who is capable of being taught' (ὁ δυνάμενος διδαχθῆναι)[53] in a spiritual way. Usefulness, in short, is an essential attribute of the 'spirit' of Scripture. For as the Holy Spirit desires the well-being of the soul, so does the 'spirit' of Scripture comprehend all the good of which the soul stands in need.

Yet, as we saw in Chapter 1, Origen thinks that the Spirit achieves a 'second aim' (*deuteros skopos*) in the inspired texts. This aim sustains its own mode of usefulness for those who cannot yet bear the burden of investigating the spiritual sense. He writes:

For [the Spirit] purposed (προέκειτο) to make even the clothing of the spiritual things (τῶν πνευματικῶν—I mean the bodily aspect (τὸ σωματικὸν) of the Scriptures—in many respects not useless (οὐκ ἀνωφελές) but capable of improving (δύναμενον βελτιοῦν) many people if only they make room for it.[54]

49 *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 334).
50 *Princ.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 312).
51 *Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 328).
52 *Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 328).
53 *Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 328).
54 *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 334), my translation.

This passage, from *On First Principles*, shows very plainly how Origen constellates divine aim, usefulness, and the quality of the text. The 'bodily aspect' (i.e. the 'body') of Scripture, like the 'spiritual truths' that it clothes, is intended to be useful to its proper audience, in this instance the 'multitude' (*τοὺς πολλούς*). We should notice that Origen contrasts what is 'useless' (*ἀνωφελές*) to what is 'capable of improving' (*δὺναμενον βελτιοῦν*). The usefulness of Scripture, as Origen conceives it, must therefore reside in its effectiveness for bettering the soul's condition. Such usefulness for soul-development and spiritual rectification meets the neophyte at his own level, where the capacity both for labour and for love is not so great as the 'spirit' requires.

Yet, the purpose of this second-order pedagogy—and the heart of its usefulness—is that it does not leave the beginner's soul unchanged. Rather it leads the carnally minded soul up a gentle slope of improvement towards the greater heights of spiritual understanding, for it is 'capable of improving many people if only they make room for it' (*δυνάμενόν τε τοὺς πολλούς, ὡς χωροῦσι, βελτιοῦν*):[55]

> ...it is impossible from the beginning that man receive pure and true doctrines. But the divine Word has provided history and Scripture with what is according to the letter in order that he could nourish first the one born to Abraham according to the flesh on those doctrines according to the flesh. And the one from the slave would arise first, so that the one of the free woman and and the one through the promise could be born after him.[56]

Scripture's usefulness to succour the reader with the *logos*-nourishment suited to its stage of growth corresponds precisely to what, in *On First Principles*, Origen describes as its power 'to edify' or 'build up' (*οἰκοδομέω*) believers according to their graduated capabilities. Thus, the simple reader is 'edified' (*ὁ μὲν ἁπλούστερος οἰκοδομῆται*) by the body of Scripture, the advancing by its soul, and the perfect by the spirit itself.[57] In the most exact sense, then, the Temple of Scripture is 'built up' out of that which 'builds up'. It is, paradoxically, an edifice that also edifies; a body that—in a truly eucharistic way—also nourishes.

[55] *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 334).
[56] *Hom. in Jer.* 5.15 (*GCS* 6. 44), tr. Smith, 58.
[57] *Princ.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 268. 310).

We may therefore ask: Does Origen think that all biblical stories about nuptial life and erotic union are 'not useful' if they are read in a 'bodily' way? Does Origen seek in such stories the fundamental absurdities of sense or moral suasion that would permit him to shift their meaning to the spiritual level? Is their only usefulness to be found in a 'bodiless' reading? The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to answering these questions.

The nuptial text as anomalous in its 'bodily' sense?

One way of approaching these questions relating to the 'usefulness' of biblical stories of nuptial life is to turn to *On First Principles* 4.3.1–3, where Origen has compiled a long catalogue of 'anomalous' scriptural texts that demand a 'bodiless' reading.[58] Each of these texts is 'not useful' in its somatic sense, either because it portrays something physically impossible (e.g. Jesus viewing all the world's kingdoms from a high mountain) or morally outrageous (e.g. that uncircumcised children should be put to death). If Origen were convinced that 'somatic' portrayals of nuptial life are 'not useful' in the hermeneutical sense defined above, innately unsuited to function as inspired literary types of the heavenly nuptials, and, moreover, if he were psychologically or theologically preoccupied with the ascetical dangers of the sexual imagination, we should expect him to speak to this issue here. This expectation is reasonable, given that Origen has earlier in *On First Principles* made a special point of the 'exceedingly great difficulty' (*διὰ τὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν χαλεπωτάτην*) of distilling the mysteries from biblical stories of marriage and procreation.[59] His asomatic reading of the Song could then be explained simply as a logical extension of a more generic 'anomalization' of biblical nuptial imagery.

In fact, however, only one of the thirteen narrative 'impossibilities' and anomalies cited by Origen has any relation to marriage or sexuality at all. We shall look at this example in some detail to see if it justifies the charges that self-contradiction, tension and negation

[58] *Princ.* 4.3.1–3 (*SC* 268. 342–56).
[59] *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 304).

colour Origen's interpretation of nuptial *erôs*, or whether, in fact, it does not begin to prove the contrary. He writes:

Further, the apostle lays down this precept: 'Was any called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised' [1 Cor. 7: 18]. Now in the first place anyone who wishes can see that these words have no relation to the subject at hand; and how can we help thinking that they have been inserted at random, when *we remember that the apostle is here laying down precepts about marriage and purity.* In this second place, who will maintain that it is wrong for a man to put himself into a condition of uncircumcision, if that were possible, in view of the disgrace which is felt by most people to attach to circumcision?[60] (emphasis added)

As Origen interprets it, Paul's teaching on the meaning of circumcision and uncircumcision belongs to the category of 'bodiless' texts that he calls 'impossibilities that are enacted in the law' (ἀδύνατα νομοθετούμενα).[61] Yet, in this instance, the anomaly of which Origen writes is not specific to marriage itself. Rather, it lies, on Origen's reading, in the way that Paul imparts his teaching on 'marriage and purity' to his Corinthian audience.

How so? First, Origen contends that Paul's precept on circumcision interrupts the logical flow of his longer discussion of marriage and sexuality (1 Cor. 6: 15–7: 16). What to our eyes is only an abrupt, but not erratic, change of focus in Paul's more general teaching on states of life appears to Origen as an freewheeling turn from the subject at hand (i.e. marriage); that is to say, it interrupts the *akolouthia* of the passage. Second, Origen argues that the command itself—not to uncircumcise oneself—is absurd if taken at face value, since removing the marks of circumcision is impossible by its very nature; and what is literally impossible in Scripture must be understood spiritually. And in any case, Origen ventures that uncircumcision is preferable to the social stigma of circumcision; why, he asks, would any man of true culture wish to remain circumcised if he could undo the crude surgery?

Origen has already argued that the way in which God teaches us in Scripture cannot be truly incoherent or full of absurdities, at least in

[60] *Princ* 4.3.3 (*SC* 268. 354–6).

[61] *Princ.* 4.3.2 (*SC* 268. 348). These legal anomalies are rules that cannot be obeyed in the bodily sense, whether (1) because they are absurd in context, or (2) because they are essentially incapable of being fulfilled.

its spiritual aspect. Rather, as we observed in Chapter 1, these apparent 'hindrances and impossibilities' in the sensible reading are what Origen calls 'stumbling-blocks' (*skandala*)—lower-level incoherences that compel the reader to look for a higher coherence. Where the edge of the biblical sword seems to be most jagged is precisely where it most sharply divides body and spirit, the fleshly mind from the spiritual.

Consequently, Origen would have us understand that the true rhythm and wisdom of the divine teaching on 'circumcision' here must be sought in an order of being that neither bodies nor the sensible imagination can enter. On this level of conception, Origen thinks, Paul will be seen not in fact to have turned away from the subject of marriage but, instead, to have shifted onto a spiritual plane our manner of comprehending the nature of marriage itself. 'Circumcision' *means* marriage and the marriage act; 'uncircumcision' *means* continence.

It is, in fact, precisely because Origen expects a continuous development of ideas that he can distil a spiritual teaching on the goods of marriage from Paul's seemingly unrelated words concerning 'circumcision'. Indeed, Origen does not use Paul's obscure (to Origen, at least) maxim on circumcision to empty his preceding counsels on marriage of a somatic meaning, suitable for the moral instruction of the ordinary Christian. Rather, he clearly understands the plain, 'somatic' sense of Paul's teaching on the sanctity of marriage in 1 Corinthians 6–7 to hold good, while also being prolonged in a new direction through Paul's anomalous words on 'circumcision'.[62]

In his *Commentary on First Corinthians*, now preserved only in fragments, Origen more fully develops the allegorical sense of Paul's teaching. He reasons as follows. In Paul's peculiar usage in this context, 'circumcision' and 'uncircumcision' must be treated as names for states of life, that is, marriage and continence. Yet Paul has also taught that it is wrong for a man to 'uncircumcise' himself. Origen completes the syllogism: it is therefore wrong for a man to lay aside his wife, even for the greater good of continence. Thus he declares:

[62] The ordinariness of Paul's teaching—its simple orientation towards the Christian's moral and social life—probably further inclines Origen to read the circumcision text anomalously, rather than as simply enlarging the scope of Paul's teaching on states of life.

But what then is salvation? 'Keeping the laws of God' [cf. 1 Cor. 7: 19] ... Accordingly, each should remain in the vocation in which he was called. Were you called, being married? Do not envy the unmarried. Were you called while unmarried? Do not by any means seek to marry, if you are able to live more purely.[63]

In this text, then, Origen makes uses of Paul's teaching to speak to the errors of those persons who might suppose, for reasons ranging from scrupulosity to encratism, that nuptial life is barely compatible with Christian praxis or even inimical to salvation. 'What, then, is salvation?'—it is, Origen assures us, the fulfilment of the divine commandments that ensures the Christian's salvation. Since God permits Christians to marry, spouses have nothing to fear on account of their nuptial life. Indeed, marriage in the Christian dispensation has taken on a new dignity equal to every Christian's high calling. It now represents the union, harmony, and mutual fidelity of Christ and his own Bride. Christian marriage, like this union, must be indissoluble; divorce, once permitted under the old dispensation, is no longer licit.

We see, then, that far from busying himself to create within the class of 'bodiless' texts a special category for biblical stories of love and marriage, Origen has instead interpreted a 'bodiless' text in a way that validates the temporal value of marriage while pointing to its orientation to higher and more permanent goods. This example, then, has shown how Origen will deal with a scriptural text written specifically for instruction (e.g. Paul's epistles). Let us turn then to see how Origen addresses the interpretation of biblical narratives or *historiai* that have a nuptial, erotic or sexual subject matter.

The nuptial text as focus of special interpretative difficulty?

Without any doubt, Origen considers biblical stories about marriages to be a special source of perplexity for the Christian reader. The following passage from *On First Principles,* for example, uses the example of nuptial stories to epitomize those obscurities in Scripture that really conceal higher mysteries:

[63] *ἀλλὰ τί ἐστι τὸ σῶζον; Τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ ... ἕκαστος οὖν ἐν τῇ κλήσει ᾗ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω. ἐκλήθης ἐν γάμῳ; μὴ ζήλου τὸν ἄγαμον. ἐκλήθης ἄγαμος; μὴ πάντως ἐπισπῶ, εἰ δύνασαι καθαρώτερον ζῆν*, *Comm. in I Cor.* frag. 37, *JTS* 9 (1908), 507 (my translation).

That there are certain mystical revelations (*καὶ ὅτι μὲν οἰκονομίαι τινές εἰσι μυστικαί*) made known through the divine Scriptures is believed by all, even by the simplest of those who are adherents of the word; but what these revelations are, fair-minded and humble men confess that they do not know... And they declare that all narratives that are supposed to speak about marriage or the begetting of children (*πᾶσαν δὲ διήγησιν νομιζομένην περὶ γάμων ἀπαγγέλλειν ἢ παιδοποιῶν*)... that may be accepted among the multitudes are types (*τύπους*); but when we ask, of what, then sometimes owing to the lack of thorough training, sometimes owing to rashness, and occasionally, even when one is well trained and of sound judgement, owing to man's exceedingly great difficulty (*διὰ τὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν χαλεπωτάτην εὕρεσιν τῶν πραγμάτων τοῖς ἀνθρώποις*) in discovering these things the interpretation of every detail is not altogether clear.[64]

Interpreting these nuptial stories and types, Origen explains, offers an immense challenge even to the learned and spiritually experienced reader. How much more difficult, then, must it be to the simple or untrained Christian. Perhaps then, some might speculate, Origen deems their difficulty to be so great that they are simply not useful to the beginner at all. Their proper use would consequently, it is supposed, fall to the 'perfect' who, having severed their attachment to bodily vanities, would read these narratives in a 'bodiless' way. From this perspective, Origen's 'bodiless' reading of the Song would only represent a deduction from the position that he takes in the passage above.

Origen's words may, in fact, appear to provide strong evidence for such a line of reasoning. For, if one supposes from the outset that his problematizing of the Scripture's nuptial motifs begins in a deep suspicion of embodied *erôs,* it must seem at first glance a foregone conclusion that Origen has numbered these narratives among the problem passages of Scripture mainly because he is especially distrustful of their sexual and erotic elements, regarding them as a hermeneutical—as well as a moral—snare for the unwary. That Origen has in mind here the sexual, procreative dimension of marriage and considers it a significant focus of hermeneutical obscurity in these texts cannot be denied; his language—namely his allusion to the 'begetting of children'—implies a precision of the nuptial category beyond 'marriage' conceived only in its public dimension.

[64] *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 302–4).

Closer scrutiny of the entire passage in its context, however, suggests that Origen does not in fact intend to make sexuality the focus of the 'exceedingly great difficulty' of these biblical stories of marriage and procreation. In this section of *On First Principles*, Origen aims to teach the right way of drawing out the hidden mysteries of Scriptures. He opposes this 'way' (ὅδος) to the 'sensible' (αἰσθητῶς—i.e. materialistic)[65] readings of the Jews and to the 'fantasies' (ἀναπλασμοί), 'myth-making' (μυθοποιέω),[66] and 'secrets of knowledge' (τὰ ἀπόρρητα τῆς γνώσεως) in the interpretations of the Gnostics.[67] Origen specifically associates these two groups with errant speculation on the spiritual significance of marriage and sexual generation—the Jews with a fleshly, unspiritual attachment to hereditary claims, the Gnostics with a false theology of the syzygies and an initiatic cultus of a nuptial character.[68] It seems, consequently, that Origen has included these tales of 'marriage and the begetting of children' in his catalogue only because they have been a special source of error or confusion amongst readers who do not know the true arts of interpretation. He gives no indication here of any particular concern over the erotic and sexual aspects of marriage, even though he plainly has them in mind, nor that he assumes the normal chain of analogy between earthly and heavenly realities to have been in some way broken in the case of embodied nuptial life.

It is equally significant that Origen does not gauge the complexity of reading these nuptial or sexual narratives any higher than that of interpreting the other problematic texts and types listed in *On First Principles*. In Origen's brief taxonomy of difficult texts, the mysterious types of marriage, intercourse, and begetting stand in parity alongside the 'equipment of the tabernacle', 'wars', 'prophecies ... filled with riddles and dark sayings', the gospels (enigmatic, because they are the 'mind of Christ'), the 'obscurity' of the Apocalypse, and 'thousands of

[65] *Princ.* 4.2.1 (*SC* 268. 294). [66] *Princ.* 4.2.1 (*SC* 268. 298).

[67] *Princ.* 4.2.3 (*SC* 268. 308). Origen notes the irony that, while the Gnostics boast of 'books containing the secrets of knowledge (τὰ ἀπόρρητα τῆς γνώσεως) and the all-perfect mysteries', they do not hold the real 'key of knowledge' (ἡ τῆς γνώσεως κλεὶς); while the Jews, whom the Gnostics deride for their belief in the Creator, do possess this 'key' but will not use it to 'enter in' (εἰσέρχομαι), i.e. interpret the Law and Prophets in light of Christ.

[68] On the Jews and claims attached to physical descent, see *Princ.* 4.3.7 (*SC* 268. 368). Against Gnostic aeonology (e.g. of Basilides), see e.g. *Jo.* 2.155 (*SC* 120bis. 312).

passages' in the epistles that lead to the 'deepest thoughts'. Each of these, in their very obscurity, hold safe the *οἰκονομίαι μυστικαὶ*, opening only to the reader who holds what Origen calls the 'key of knowledge' (*ἡ τῆς γνώσεως κλείς*; cf. Luke 11: 52).[69]

Furthermore, throughout this section of *On First Principles*, Origen has defined only a single, undifferentiated category of 'difficult texts' to which all the identified problem texts belong. It stands to reason, therefore, that if the sort of difficulty which he has in mind is sufficiently extreme to compel a 'bodiless' reading of stories about marriage and procreation, then all the texts in his catalogue should also require the same kind of reading. But, at least some of the 'difficult texts' that Origen cites—stories of wars, the temple apparatus, the events of the gospels—are, on his own terms, somatic or 'bodily'. Their 'exceedingly great difficulty' is not incompatible with a certain usefulness to the beginner, even if these 'beginners'—as in the case of the tabernacle for instance—were the beneficiaries of a usefulness now decisively ended with the appearance of the New Covenant. Certainly, therefore, the shape of Origen's conception in this passage gives us no licence to assume that biblical 'narratives... about marriage and the begetting of children' do not possess some trace of bodily or historical sense useful to even the 'simplest' Christian. Origen has articulated the notion of 'difficulty' far too broadly for us definitely to place these narratives among 'bodiless' texts; likewise, as we have observed, difficulty alone does not suffice to mandate a 'bodiless' interpretation.

Elsewhere, in fact, Origen very plainly asserts the historicity of biblical 'narratives... about marriage and the begetting of children' as well as their susceptibility to an allegorical interpretation. One such passage, taken from *Against Celsus*, is particularly valuable for our study:

> In many passages the Word made use of stories about actual events (*ἱστορίαις γενομέναις συγχρησάμενος ὁ λόγος*) and recorded them to exhibit deeper truths, which are indicated by means of hints. Of this sort are the stories about the wells, and the marriages (*καὶ τὰ περὶ τοὺς γάμους*), and the intercourse of righteous men with different women (*καὶ τὰς διαφόρους μίξεις τῶν δικαίων*).[70]

[69] *Princ.* 4.2.3 (*SC* 268. 308). [70] *Cels.* 4.44 (*SC* 136. 296).

Significantly, Origen is addressing Celsus' accusation that Christians use the artifice of allegory to clear up difficulties and scandals in the 'literal sense' of the biblical narratives. This is, of course, precisely the charge that so many critics level against his 'bodiless' interpretation of the Song. Yet here, with explicit reference to the intimate details of nuptial life ('marriages, and the intercourse of righteous men with different women'), Origen consciously maintains an exact correspondence of bodily facts ('actual events') with spiritual realities ('deeper truths') in biblical 'stories' preserved and recorded through divine inspiration.

In no way does Origen suggest that the usefulness of such stories depends upon the negation of their somatic sense. The Word has ratified these narratives, including them for the benefit of all. Origen does not mean, of course, that their ultimate usefulness lies in their corporeal meaning. Rather, the allegorical sense reveals what is good and of use in the new Christian dispensation. He explains:

> It is not we who teach that brides and maidservants are to be interpreted allegorically, but we have received this from wise men before us . . . Anyone who likes to take up the Epistle to the Galatians will know how the stories about the marriages and the intercourse with the maidservants may be allegorized. For the Word does not want us to emulate those who did these things in respect of their physical acts, as they are commonly supposed, but to emulate their spiritual actions, as they are usually called by the apostles of Jesus.[71]

The bodily sexual acts of the Old Testament saints, Origen suggests, are no longer intended to be taken by themselves as models for Christian imitation. Yet, conjoined with each of these 'physical acts' is a worthy 'spiritual action' which sanctified it in the past and which now supplies the appropriate motive for Christian behaviour. In this respect, then, the 'bodily' meaning of such stories is no longer sufficient to provide unfailing moral guidance to Christians. Even so, the 'bodily' sense permanently retains its hermeneutical usefulness as the 'sensible'—and historically true—foundation for all further anagogical and spiritual readings of the text.

This, at least, is how Origen approaches the question of nuptial allegories in the abstract. We must now expand our investigation to

[71] *Cels.* 4.44 (*SC* 136. 298).

include his actual exposition of such difficult texts about 'marriages and the begetting of children'. Origen's own conclusions and procedures will put us in a better position to judge to what extent the presence of nuptial, erotic or sexual themes might prompt him to open the escape-hatch of the 'bodiless' reading.

'THE SINS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN AND THE WICKEDNESS OF THE LAWLESS': ORIGEN'S READING OF DIFFICULT NARRATIVES WITH NUPTIAL THEMES

Texts recounting sexual transgression as sources of moral instruction: Amnon's rape of Thamar

Let us look first, then, at Origen's treatment of scriptural texts in which, on these terms, he would be most likely to find a 'bodiless', asomatic sense. Scattered throughout his writings are examples of a type of allegorical reading in which he discerns *oikonomiai mystikai* and revelations even in those biblical stories that—at least to Origen's mind—tell of seemingly illicit desires and sexual acts. Very significantly, as we shall see, he develops these mystical readings of a 'scandalous *erôs*' without recourse to the hermeneutical devices either of the narrative 'stumbling-block' or of pseudo-historical interpolations in the biblical text. He prolongs these stories in the direction of the spiritual while preserving their historicity and their real corporeality intact.

The most obvious examples of such allegories arise from those stories wherein the somatic representation of sinful deeds is meant to administer a healthy dose of moral realism even to the simple reader. The prophets, Origen explains:

> ... recorded the acts of the righteous (*δικαίων πράξεις*) and the sins (*ἁμαρτήματα*) that these same persons occasionally committed, seeing they were but human, and the deeds of wickedness, licentiousness and greed done by lawless and impious men (*καὶ ἀνόμων καὶ ἀσεβῶν πονηρίας καὶ ἀκολασίας καὶ πλεονεξίας*).[72]

[72] *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 332).

Such stories are bitter, but they are medicine for the soul. God has placed these in Scripture not for the edification of the mature reader, who has no need of such elementary lessons in the just life, but for the guidance and moral reproof of the beginner. This instruction of the novice through engaging stories corresponds to what Origen calls God's 'second aim' in Scripture. The 'aim' of these accounts of 'scandalous *erôs*', then, is to epitomize in vivid texture the Scripture's more preceptive admonitions against 'fornication of the flesh' (*fornicatio carnalis*) or 'fornication of the body' (*corporis fornicatio*).[73] Laying bare the evil roots and results of lust, these stories make such desire undesirable.

Origen cites a typical example of such a story in the Prologue to the *Commentary on the Song*—Amnon's sexual violation of his sister Thamar (2 Sam. 13: 1, 2, 14 f.). Origen uses this story to illustrate his hypothesis of the prophylactic euphemism—i.e. that 'the Divine Scripture is anxious to avoid the danger of the mention of love becoming an occasion of falling (*lapsus*) for its readers'[74]—and, for that reason, often substitutes the more seemly word (i.e. *caritas* or *dilectio*) for the more provocative one (i.e. *amor*). Thus, where Amnon clearly burned with a violent lust (*adamavit*)[75] that turned to hatred, the scriptural text calls his desire 'love' (*dilectio* = LXX ἠγάπησεν, ἀγάπη).

Origen shows this story to contain not only an implicit moral teaching on the evils of incest and rape—'the outrage (*violentia*) that Amnon did'—but also an ascetical teaching on the psychology of lust and disordered *erôs*. Indeed, Origen understands the prophet's use of euphemism to emphasize, rather than to downplay, the qualities and consequences of lust. He alludes briefly to several of these: (1) the power of the beautiful image ('very fair of face') to incite lust; (2) the association of passion and heart-sickness ('so troubled that he fell sick'); (3) the inner division of the personality that follows upon passionate desire; and (4) the fruition of strong passion in even stronger hatred, familiarity breeding contempt ('the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love [*dilectio*] with which he had loved her').[76]

[73] *Hom. in Ez.* 7.6 (*GCS* 33. 396); *Hom Num.* 20.1–2 (*GCS* 30. 187–9).
[74] *Cant.* prol. 2.20 (*SC* 375. 104).
[75] *Cant.* prol. 2.21 (*SC* 375. 106).
[76] *Cant.* prol. 2.21 (*SC* 375. 106).

Origen does not, however, develop this story of Amnon and Thamar allegorically, either here or in his other extant reference to the story.[77] There is, of course, nothing to prevent him from reading the story for higher senses beyond a straightforward moral teaching. In fact, the rape, incest, and lust themes of the story readily analogize to certain features of Origen's conception of the devil and his role in the Fall (e.g. the devil's origin as a 'brother' soul of all other rational beings; Satan as doing 'sexual' violence to the primordial Bride).[78] Yet, here Origen confines this narrative of disordered *erôs* to the sensible, historical order.

Texts concerning sexual transgression as sources of moral allegory: the whoredoms of Oholah and Oholibah

Elsewhere in Scripture, however, Origen finds God pursuing his primary pedagogical 'aim'—that of revealing spiritual mysteries and doctrines to the more adept reader—under the veil of actual histories of lust and sexual sin. Behind these true stories of bodily fornication and adultery, Origen thinks, God has hidden a more difficult doctrine concerning the various modes of spiritual and interior adultery.[79]

In the Prologue to the *Commentary on the Song*, Origen's approach to just such a biblical story of sexual sin more plainly draws out the coherence between God's primary and secondary 'aims'. In this instance, Origen illustrates the analogy between the adulteries of the 'outer human' (i.e. the body) and the 'inner human' (i.e. the soul) with Ezekiel's parable of the two Egyptian harlot sisters Oholah and Oholibah (Ezek. 24). A somatic, 'literal' reading of the story teaches the moral lesson of God's awful condemnation of bodily

[77] The reference in *Hom. in Jos.* 20.5 (*SC* 71, 420) is very brief and is introduced only to illustrate a major allegorical reading of the name Anak (Josh. 15: 13–14) as 'foolish humility' (*humilitas inanis*).

[78] In *Hom. in Jos.* 20.5 (*SC* 71, 420), Origen does in fact liken Amnon's 'humiliation' (*humiliavit*) of his sister 'through an illicit union' (*de illicito coitu*) to the descent or fall consequent upon sin: *est ergo humilitas inanis, quae descendit ex peccato.* The 'illicit union' is, one of Origen's principal metaphors for the devil's primordial outrage against the Bride. See Hom. in. Ex. 7.6 (*GCS* 33. 396).

[79] e.g. the Bride-Church's primordial adultery with the devil; the Bride-soul's repeated transgressions with evil spirits, through commission of sin.

fornication while, at the same time, representing unfaithful Samaria and Jerusalem under the figure of the two sisters.[80]

Yet, a 'deeper understanding' (*plenius scire*) discerns the plain lines of a second lesson for the more advanced reader: that 'the soul (*anima*) . . . may come to attach its love not to its lawful Bridegroom (*non in legitimum sponsum*), who is the Word of God, but to some seducer or adulterer (*sed in adulteram aliquem et corruptorem*)'—that is, to the devil.[81] The teaching is moral, of course, but it also has to do with superhistorical, incorporeal deeds. Thus, Origen's reading discovers in a biblical history of illicit sexuality two analogous moral teachings—an inward and an outward—concerning abuses of the soul's erotic power.[82] The teachings are analogous because the deeds themselves bear an inward likeness. Again, Origen preserves the 'body' of the text even as he seeks the 'soul' and 'spirit'.

Texts concerning sexual transgression as sources of typology: the redemption of Rahab the harlot

Our final example is taken from the *Homily 3 on Joshua*. Here, Origen interprets for his mixed gathering of listeners certain features of the story of Rahab the harlot (Josh. 2), seeking out the meaning of the house of Rahab, the crimson cord, and the window from which it hung.[83] Origen's allegory is rote. The crimson cord, protecting all who take refuge in Rahab's house, represents the blood of Christ (*signum coccineum . . . sanguinis formam*), which saves and purifies all in the house of the Church.[84] Hanging from the 'window', it typifies the Incarnation as the Logos' accommodation to limited human perception.[85] Origen situates these deeds within an interpretative

[80] *Cant.* prol. 2.18–19 (*SC* 375. 104).

[81] *Cant.* prol. 2.18 (*SC* 375. 104).

[82] Note also that Origen finds in this story essentially the same structure of meanings as in the narrative action of the Song of Songs, moving from communal, social allegory (Ohola and Oholibah as Samaria and Jerusalem; Bride as Church) to an allegory concerning the individual (the 'soul' in both instances).

[83] *Hom. in Jos.* 3.5 (*SC* 71. 140–4). See also *Comm. in Mt.* 12.4 (*GCS* 41/1. 10).

[84] *Hom. in Jos.* 3.5 (*SC* 71. 142).

[85] *Hom. in Jos.* 3.5 (*SC* 71. 144): 'Quia ergo et incarnatio Salvatoris non nobis merum ingessit et integrum Deitatis adspectum, sed tamquam per fenestram fecit

structure in which Rahab's sins and the form of her repentance instruct the Christian according to God's multiple teaching aims.

Thus, a somatic ('second aim') reading finds in Rahab both an example of grave impurity and, equally, a model of repentance from sexual sin. Moreover, Rahab's experience of repentance is exactly that of every Christian generally, at least in the doctrinal and psychological orders. For it springs, Origen thinks, not merely from a fear of Joshua's people and their God but from a prophetic comprehension of Christ himself: 'she knew that none can be saved but by the blood of Christ' (*sciebat etenim quia nulli esset salus nisi in sanguine Christi*).[86] As a consequence of Origen's reading, his listeners can now hear the prostitute's story as morally relevant not only for those tempted by sexual desire but also for any person whomsoever in need of repentance; and so, conversely, something true of any sin whatsoever comes to view in her sexual transgression.

Yet Origen also sees in Rahab's house a deeper, spiritual *typos* of the Church, 'outside' of which 'none is saved'—just as no Jerichoites outside of Rahab's house were saved from Joshua's marauders. In keeping with the details of the story, moreover, Origen stresses that this house is that of the former prostitute: 'By that sign let all those find salvation who are found in the house of her who was once a "harlot" (*in domo quae aliquando erat meretrix*), after their cleansing in water and the Holy Spirit and in the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'[87] The sexual dimension of the story, eclipsed now by the repentance motif, allows Origen to point to a mystical analogy between Rahab the prostitute and the gentile Church, in whose 'house' Origen's audience have sought shelter. Rahab's transgression, therefore, analogizes through an innate likeness to the 'sexual' sin of the gentile Church, restored through repentance to her proper standing with her divine Spouse. And, although Origen does not finish his allegory in the superhistorical order here, his

nos per incarnationem suam lumen Deitatis adspicere, idcirco mihi videtur signum salutis per fenestram datum.' The theme of the Saviour, now as Bridegroom, standing at the 'windows' (*fenestrae*) is taken up again in connection with Song 2: 9 (*Cant.* 3.14.15–18 (*SC* 376. 664–5)), suggesting a real identity between the heavenly Bride and 'Rahab'.

[86] *Hom. in Jos.* 3.5 (*SC* 71. 142).

[87] *Hom. in Jos.* 3.5 (*SC* 71. 144), my translation.

exegesis at least tends in that direction. For, if the gentile Church in her former vagaries of desire typifies the primordial Bride—fallen through adultery and now restored through fidelity—then so must the story of Rahab be endowed to typify this nuptial 'superhistory', through the hierarchy of analogy in which both it and the gentile Church participate.[88]

The positive value of the literal sense in texts concerning sexual transgression

In the story of Amnon and Thamar, the fact that Scripture attaches the more sublime terms for 'love' (*agapê*, *dilectio*) as a legitimate name to what is really Amnon's disordered erotic 'passion' reveals, for Origen, a real continuity even between love and lust;[89] the euphemistic usage tends only to underline the tragedy of love's fall into disorder. Again, in the fable of Oholah and Oholibah, Origen understands their bodily fornications not only to typify spiritual transgression but also to recollect, through negative example, the only way for the soul finally to remedy its sin-sickness—by coming 'to attach its love . . . to its lawful Bridegroom'. Finally, Rahab's life as a prostitute, as well as her redemption along with her 'house', mirrors the superhistorical pattern of the Bride's infidelity and ultimate salvation through 'Joshua's' (i.e. Jesus') faithfulness to his promises.

Origen's readings of these three narratives teach the reader the consequences of sexual sin and, in the latter two stories, then lead him to consider its specific spiritual meaning. In each of these three instances, his interpretations presuppose a symbolic coherence between inner and outer transgression. Similarly, they also imply, in varying degrees, the powers of body and soul that make for fidelity

[88] Thus the typology here is fundamentally identical to the mystery of the Song's 'black but beautiful' Bride. Again, it becomes clear that the Bride is thus spiritual 'Rahab', once harlot but now holy. On this motif of the Bride as 'harlot and holy', H. U. von Balthasar remarks that for Origen, the 'church is both the bride without spot, and one constantly being cleansed of sin . . . The whore of Jerusalem [is a] mirror for Christians and the church', *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, tr. R. J. Daly (Washington, DC, 1984), 157.

[89] The innate goodness of the soul's 'single power of love' (*vis caritatis una*) lingers, as in image, even in love's devastation by sinful use, *Cant.* 3.7.15 (*SC* 376, 554).

and nuptial virtue in the earthly and heavenly realms. Yet it is also true that Origen has drawn what is essentially a negative lesson from these scriptural stories of sexual scandal. No clearly approving or positive assessment of embodied *erôs* can, therefore, be confidently deduced from these readings.

This is not to say that Origen thinks sexuality and *erôs* as such signify sin. It is rather that their wrong use partakes of the same sinfulness that universally infects human experience. If sexual and erotic transgressions most amply signify the deepest character of human—and indeed superhuman—sin, it is only due to the fact that sexuality, *erôs*, and nuptial experience themselves most fully bring to light the soul's fundamental character as a loving, desiring, in short *erotic* kind of creature. Corrupted, what is best becomes the worst.

The positive value of ambiguous texts concerning sexual transgression: Lot's incest with his daughters

Notwithstanding the positive lessons that Origen draws from the texts surveyed above, the fact that they are moral analogies relating fundamentally to the privation of goodness to erotic acts—whether impure corporeal deeds or the spiritual act that disposes body and soul both to sin—could leave open the question of whether he actually does perceive a complete analogy of essence between embodied sexual life in itself and higher spiritual realities. We shall therefore turn our attention to a kind of 'difficult' text in which Origen finds himself uncertain how he ought to judge the moral character of its sexual content:

> If, for instance, an inquirer were to be in a difficulty about the intercourse of Lot with his daughters (*τῆς τοῦ Λὼτ θυγατρομιξίας*), or the two wives of Abraham (*τῶν δύο γυναικῶν τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ*), or the two sisters married to Jacob (*δύο τε ἀδελφῶν γεγαμημένων τῷ Ἰακὼβ*), or the two handmaids who bore children by him (*δύο παιδισκῶν τετεκνωκυιῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ*), he can say nothing except that these things are mysteries not understood by us (*μυστήρια ταῦτα τυγχάνειν ὑφ' ἡμῶν μὴ νοούμενα*).[90]

[90] *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 302).

In his study of Scripture, Origen explains, the Christian will come across quite graphic stories of patrifilial and sibling incest, bigamy, adultery, and concubinage of doubtful virtue. The inquirer's 'difficulty' (ἐπαπορῆσαι) does not attach so much to the carnal acts themselves, on Origen's view. For, in most biblical contexts—particularly in light of the New Testament and the Church's moral teaching—these acts will stand condemned. Rather, the hermeneutical problem with these nuptial/erotic deeds arises in connection with who performed them (patriarchs, matriarchs, and Old Testament saints) and the laudable or licit reasons for which they were performed. Thus there seems to be a symbolic dissonance between the righteousness of the saints and the apparent impurity of their sexual acts.

Nevertheless, we should note that Origen simply assumes that there are 'mysteries not understood by us' (μυστήρια . . . ὑφ' ἡμῶν μὴ νοούμενα) in ambiguous texts such as these. For Origen, the inquirer's 'difficulty' in these cases has nothing to do with determining whether or not they have a somatic meaning. In fact, Origen takes it for granted that they do possess a 'bodily' sense. For example, even though Origen may feel for Abraham's bigamous unions with Sarah and Hagar a distaste that is simply alien to Paul's Jewish sensibility (Gal. 4: 21–4), his own reading remains faithful to the Pauline 'two covenant' allegory on the significant points.[91] Nowhere does Origen suggest that their historicity must be evaporated or softened if the corresponding text is to bear the weight of divine truth. Indeed, that such narratives as this one do have a 'bodily' meaning is a significant part of Origen's hermeneutical problem, which reduces to a twofold task: (1) *apologetic*: how to explain why the apparent sinfulness of the depicted sexual deed is mitigated by circumstance; (2) *hermeneutical*: how then to read the deed for its higher teachings.

How, then, does Origen manage this sort of difficult, ambiguous text when he is not specifically guided by a pre-existing apostolic reading, as he is in the case of Galatians 4: 21–4? An arresting case-study appears in connection with Origen's exegesis of Lot's incestuous relations with his daughters (Gen. 19: 30–8).[92] He begins his homiletical treatment of the problematic story:

[91] *Cels.* 4.44 (*SC* 136. 296–8); *Hom. in Gen.* 7.4 (*SC* 7bis. 204).

[92] Origen's two significant treatments of this story appear in (1) *Cels.* 4.45 (*SC* 136. 298–302) and (2) *Hom. in Gen.* 5.3–6 (*SC* 7bis.168–80).

So, there follows the well-known story where we see the daughters of Lot scheming to unite surreptitiously with their father. I do not know if the excuses that we can make for Lot are enough to exempt him from all fault. And I no more think it necessary to charge him to the point of making him shoulder the burden of a thing so grave as incest . . . [93]

This story is, of course, famously difficult, known even among pagan critics who used it to ridicule the seeming crudity of Jewish and Christian religion. Celsus, for example, points to Lot's deed—'more iniquitous than Thyestian sins'—to bolster his case against Christianity.[94] Before Origen, it drew the special attention of Philo[95] and remained also a classic topos of moral obscurity in patristic literature. Origen exerts himself—like Irenaeus before him[96]—to make some positive moral sense of its literal meaning.

First, then, Origen begins with his apologetic step, seeking to show that Lot and his daughters were not entirely culpable for immorality. On the one side, then, are certain mitigating factors[97] that work in Lot's favour: (1) his freedom from concupiscence and sensuality; and (2) his lack of conscious complicity in the deed, for he was drunk—his one transgression—and incapable of 'acting under impulse of will'. As for his daughters, who instigated the act of incest, Origen insists that their actions must be viewed in light of the terrible destruction of Sodom. Thinking in their 'simplicity and innocence' that the world had been destroyed by fire, he explains, they believed it their duty to restore the human race even at the almost inestimable price of their chastity:

. . . they lay with their father only to ensure the descent of mortals, thinking . . . that it would be a greater impiety to safeguard their chastity at the cost of destroying hope for human posterity.[98]

[93] *Hom. in Gen.* 5.3 (*SC* 7bis.168), my translation.

[94] *Cels.* 4.45 (*SC* 136. 298–300). Celsus, of course, indulges in a little exculpating allegory of his own, in connection with certain prurient Greek myths. Origen does not let this hypocrisy go unremarked; see *Cels.* 4.48 (*SC* 136. 306–8).

[95] *Quaest. in. Genes.* 4.55–6 (*OPA* 34B. 240–2).

[96] *Haer.* 4.31 (*SC* 100).

[97] Origen speaks of 'softening down the discreditable features of the story', *Cels.* 4.45 (*SC* 136. 300).

[98] 'Recuperandi igitur humani generis desiderium sumunt atque instaurandi saeculi ex sese dandum opinantur exordium. Et quamvis grande iis crimen videretur furari concubitum patris, gravior tamen iis videbatur impietas, si humanae, ut putabant, posteritatis spem servata castitate delerent', *Hom. in Gen.* 5.4 (*SC* 7bis. 172), my translation.

According to Origen, then, no hint of concupiscence tainted the daughters' desire [*desiderium*]. Their only wish was to 'restore the human race' (*recuperandi humani generis*), not to lie with their father for pleasure as an end in itself. The underlying argument, as Origen himself observes in *Against Celsus*, appeals to the Stoic ethical doctrine of 'indifferent actions' (*οὐδέτερα/ἀδιάφορα*)—that motive alone determines the moral value of any deed.[99] The daughters' motive for initiating the 'unlawful intercourse' was worthy, if misguided, and the action itself was executed dispassionately.[100]

Origen's second move is even more significant. He now proceeds to build a spiritual reading on the foundation of the story's 'bodily' sense, which he has now fully endorsed and secured. In his homiletical exegesis, however, he moves from a moral vindication of Lot and his daughters to a full allegorical treatment of the incest story as a type of the deeds of Judaism and Christianity which, like Lot's two daughters, both originate from one father (i.e. Lot or God) and then produce 'sons' (i.e. children or converts) from him.[101] But he also discovers in the story a moral teaching appropriate to the less speculative concerns of his listeners:

> I hesitate to express my view ... whether their incest was not more chaste than the chastity of many women. Let married women examine themselves and ask themselves if they have only sought out their husband in order to have children and if they cease to do so when they have conceived.[102]

[99] L. R. Hennessey places this specific application of the *adiaphora* doctrine in the context of Origen's sometimes uneasy efforts to harmonize Christian moral theology and Stoic theories of the strictly subjective or objective status of indifferent action; see 'Origen of Alexandria: The Fate of the Soul and the Body after Death', *Second Century* 8 (Fall, 1991), 163–78.

[100] By contrast, certain sexual behaviours (e.g. using prostitutes) are instrinsically evil—and not matters of indifference—because they always imply wicked intent: 'Are not the worms in the filth those who wander round licentious women (and most men are like that) and those who live with harlots as though it were a matter of indifference (*ἀδιαφόρως*), even teaching that this is not at all contrary to moral principle?', *Cels.* 4.26 (*SC* 136. 246).

[101] In *Against Celsus*, Origen does not judge it necessary to 'discuss now the allegorical meaning of the passage', but obviously thinks that one exists.

[102] 'Vereor proloqui quod sentio; vereor, inquam, ne castior fuerit harum incestus quam pudicitia multarum. Discutiant se et requirant feminae in coniugiis positae, si ob hoc solum adeant viros ut suscipiant liberos, si post conceptum desistunt', *Hom. in Gen.* 5.4 (*SC* 7bis. 172), my translation.

Despite appearances, Origen is not indulging in irony, as though the chastity (*pudicitia*) of married women faithful to their husbands were not truly chaste. With cautious, 'hesitating' (*vereor*) deference to his audience, Origen reasons that the selfless motives of Lot and his daughters, purified of sensual dispositions, deeply transformed the moral character of a deed that would otherwise have been a crime. Indeed, so complete was this transformation that their incest may, in a very restricted sense, become a model for Christian imitation.

It is, however, a measure of the suspicions that cling to Origen's views on embodied sexuality and its analogical value that J. Daniélou can charge Origen with misusing his principle of the 'bodiless' text to whitewash the sexual element of the story of Lot and his daughters. Citing no reference to primary texts, Daniélou declares: 'Enfin le principe devient pleinement contestable quand il s'agit de supprimer le scandale de certains récits que contient l'Ancien Testament, par exemple celui de l'inceste de Loth ou d'autres épisodes . . .'[103] Daniélou is simply mistaken about Origen's reading of the story of Lot's incest. For, as we can now see, Origen does not in fact attempt to whitewash the actual scandal of Lot's incest. On the contrary, in *Against Celsus* he commends 'the honesty of the authors of the divine Scriptures, who did not even conceal discreditable events (*μὴ κρυψάντων καὶ τὰ ἀπεμφαίνοντα*).'[104] For Origen, no less than for Clement or Irenaeus, 'the interior of a text'—so writes M. Edwards—'could not be cleaner than its outside'.[105] Daniélou's error in the passage above must not only lead us to wonder whether Origen's readings of the 'other episodes' that Daniélou has in mind are any more damning than the one cited but also to question whether Daniélou has not, in fact, actually misunderstood the function that the 'bodiless' text serves in Origen's hermeneutic.

[103] *Origène*, 181.

[104] *Cels.* 4.45 (*SC* 136. 298).

[105] 'Gnostics, Greeks, and Origen', 80. See also his brief but judicious remarks on Origen's reading of the story of Lot's incest, pp. 83–4.

'MARRIAGES, INTERCOURSE AND THE BEGETTING OF CHILDREN': ORIGEN'S READING OF NARRATIVES OF RIGHTEOUS NUPTIALITY

The coherence of earthly and heavenly nuptiality

So far, we have looked only at nuptial or sexually charged texts whose difficulty might well have prompted Origen, had he been so inclined, to apply his theory of 'bodiless' texts against the frustrating scandal and obscurity of the literal sense. He does not do so. Admittedly, to reach the divine truth of these stories of sexual scandal or ambiguity—and likewise of the veridical events in which they originate—Origen must first prescind from whatever sinfulness inheres objectively in the narrated sexual act. But the act itself, whatever the failings of its agents, is the certain sign of heavenly truths. To Origen's mind, then, these scriptural texts point unflinchingly towards lamentable carnal realities and yet infallibly towards the higher mysteries to which they pertain.

We shall now turn to consider passages in which Origen maintains a real and positive coherence between the heavenly nuptials and true biblical histories of a rightly ordered nuptial life wherein desire and sexual expression are orientated to a divine finality, namely the union of Christ and his Bride. For the sake of brevity, we shall look closely at only two such examples. The first of these will show how Origen approaches a biblical narrative that involves the 'begetting of children', the second, a story that portrays 'the intercourse of righteous men with different women'.[106] Our goal will be to determine to what extent Origen willingly develops a positive reading of the 'bodily' sense when the text itself eases the way.

'The begetting of children': Origen's allegory of the descent of Israel

Our case-study for Origen's analysis of narratives telling of 'the begetting of children' is taken from *On First Principles* 4.3.6–7.[107]

[106] See again *Princ.* 4.2.2 (*SC* 268. 302–4); *Cels.* 4.44 (*SC* 136. 296–8).

[107] *SC* 268. 364–8.

In this short section, Origen compares the historical ancestry of the Jews to the spiritual lineage of Christians, drawing out implications for the superior claims of Christian covenant identity. It is, as G. W. Butterworth notes, a very difficult passage, one in which his 'allusions . . . are far from clear';[108] simple incomprehension, then, is perhaps the reason that Rufinus has left it out of his translation altogether. Notwithstanding its obscurity (which, in any case, is not impenetrable), this particular illustration suits our immediate needs better than Origen's other important genealogical allegories. For in this case his exegesis hinges upon the symbolism not only of human generations but finally of the fact of human generation (i.e., 'begetting') itself. We shall see how Origen involves a range of nuptial motifs to draw out the implications of this central reality.

In this section of *On First Principles*, Origen proves the distinctiveness of the 'race of bodily Jews' (*Ἰουδαίωνσωματικῶν γένος*)[109] by straightforward appeal to their ancestry. Origen explains, therefore, that the 'bodily Israelites' (i.e. ethnic Jews) find their special identity in the fact of their bodily descent from ancestors uniquely blessed by God—the 'rulers of the people' (*δήμαρχοι*), the twelve patriarchs, and especially Jacob. These 'bodily Israelites' (*οἱ σωματικοὶ Ἰσραηλῖται*) consequently are able to 'trace back'[110] their lineage not only to Jacob but, as Origen says, 'to those still more ancient', that is, Isaac and Abraham.

Origen's actual reading of Old Testament genealogies does not disappoint our expectations. Rather, he upholds their historicity as a necessary proof and safeguard of Old Covenant identity. Notwithstanding the real dignity of their ancestry, Origen argues here that the bodily descent of the Jews bears only a provisional, though crucial, significance in God's economy. Paul's 'Israel after the flesh', a local and instrumental cause of salvation, has given way to a universal finality in 'Israel after the spirit' (1 Cor. 10: 18). The character of the 'intelligible Israelites' (*οἱ νοηγοί Ἰσραηλῖται*; i.e. Christians) does not depend upon hereditary claims. Instead, their identity as the 'race of

[108] *On First Principles*, 298 (n. 5).

[109] *Princ.* 4.3.6 (*SC* 268. 366).

[110] Origen's word is *ἀναγωγή*; we should be prepared for hermeneutical implications. *Princ.* 4.3.6 (268. 368).

those who are "Jews inwardly" ' (τῶν ἐν κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαίων ἐστιτι ἔθνος)[111] flows from their share in a spiritual lineage constituted by spiritual birth into a community of faith. Hence, Origen describes this lineage as a descent through 'clans' and 'tribes' (δήμοι and φύλα; i.e. spiritual communities) that find their true father in 'the one (i.e. Jacob) whose birth was not bodily... but of a higher kind' (ἀπὸ ἑνός τινος, γένεσιν οὐ τοιαύτηνσωματικὴνἔχοντοςἀλλὰ τὴνκρείτ τονα).[112] Jacob, in turn, descends from Isaac and Abraham, and 'all go back (πάντωνἀναγομένων) to Adam, who the apostle says is Christ' (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 45).

Throughout this reading, we see that Origen lays characteristic emphasis upon the bodily, 'somatic' nature of the Jewish lineage, which consequently can bear only a transient role in the divine economy. Yet, Origen gives no hint in this section of intending to oppose the bodily and spiritual Israels one to another. Rather, he understands 'Israel after the flesh' to be a corporeal sign that reveals the character of 'Israel after the spirit', a fact he emphasizes twice in this section:

(1) the promises are of a spiritual kind announced through material imagery (αι ἐπαγγελίαι νοηταί ἐισι δι' αἰσθητῶν ἀπαγγελλόμεναι);

(2) the spiritual Israelites, of whom the bodily ones were a type (οἱ δὲ νοητοὶ Ἰςραηλτται, ὧν τύπος ἦσαν οἱ σωματικοί).[113]

As with most other biblical texts and narratives, then, Origen preserves intact the complex relation of corporeal and spiritual senses. For the exegete, this relation will be perceived with greatest immediacy in the verbal realm of the biblical text, which holds 'promises' (ἐπαγγελίαι) under the seal of the 'sensible' (δι' αἰσθητῶν). Nevertheless, Origen also anchors this 'material imagery' in a physical reality, inasmuch as it is really the 'bodily [Israelites]' who were an historical *typos* of the spiritual ones.

Origen proposes the most intimate relation between the 'somatic' signifier and what is signified in the 'spirit'. In other words, the 'body' and 'spirit' are not extrinsically but intrinsically associated. The

111 *Princ.* 4.3.6 (*SC* 268. 366).
112 *Princ.* 4.3.7 (*SC* 268. 368).
113 *Princ.* 4.3.6, 7 (*SC* 268. 366, 8).

sensible imagery, after all, does not merely point to but rather mediates ('announced *through*') the promises as they come to fulfilment.[114] This suggests, in turn, that Origen understands it to be the material reality of the Jewish lineage that mediates the fulfilment seen in Christ and his Church. In other words, the bodily signature abides in—and not in spite of—an identity transmitted through physical generation and hence by means of the sexual act that is bound up with it.

Admittedly, Origen does not enter upon a frank discussion of 'marriage or the begetting of children' here, nor does he need to do so. In any case, this omission hardly empties his reading of its obvious nuptial and sexual background, which, as we shall prove, Origen was entirely aware of involving at the foundation of his exegesis. He does not lapse into reserved or allusive forms of speech, as we might expect if he were genuinely preoccupied either with avoiding or exposing the spiritual dangers inherent in the nuptial idea. Even though his exegesis takes him close to the intimate structures of nuptial life, he comports himself without embarrassment, discomfort, or suspicion.

On the contrary, Origen capitalizes on the typological value of physical generation. In fact, he has *expanded* the limits of his discussion to include this theological analysis of genealogy, with all of its nuptial virtualities. It is significant that the Pauline text (Rom. 2: 28–9) that stands in the background of Origen's analysis at no point introduces nuptial categories of any kind, including genealogy, to support its case. Origen therefore, freely brings them to the table himself. Furthermore, it is clear that his primary objective in this section of *On First Principles*—comparing 'Israel after the flesh' and 'Israel after the spirit' so as to illustrate the difference between 'letter'

[114] In Origen's usage, the idea of fulfilment itself embraces a corporeal and a spiritual sense. In one respect, the promises are fulfilled historically by Christ who takes upon himself the fleshly body concretely mediated by the Jewish people. In another respect, the textual, verbal *logos* that denotes and imparts a somatic understanding of the Jewish lineage and the promises made to it finds its fulfilment in a spiritual understanding of those promises; yet those promises are, again, mediated by the same *logos* that conveys the corporeal sense. Finally, then, we see that the historically mediated fulfilment itself finds a higher—because more verbal and intelligible—fulfilment spiritually mediated in the verbal-intelligible structures of the sacred text.

and 'spirit'—in no way requires him to introduce the subject of bodily descent. Yet, introduce it he does, independently and quite against what our expectations should be if we thought that he was generally committed to suppressing or reducing the visibility of physical nuptiality in Scripture.

Additionally, Origen does not lean on merely general or schematic forms of speech to describe the relation of these two lines of descent (i.e. the bodily and the spiritual). Rather, he carefully spells out a one-to-one correlation between the descent of the 'bodily Israelites' and the communal legacy of spiritual Israel. The correlation consists of four analogous stages: (1) 'rulers of the people': 'clans'; (2) 'patriarchs': 'tribes'; (3) 'Jacob' : 'one whose birth . . . was of a higher kind'; (4) 'those still more ancient' : 'Isaac . . . Abraham . . . Adam').[115] The fact that Origen speaks here of Jacob's 'birth . . . of a higher kind' (*γένεσιν τὴν κρείττονα*)—a phrase referring to the extraordinary character of the patriarch's conception, rather than his birth per se (Gen. 25: 21–6)—powerfully indicates Origen's orientation to nuptial categories. For it shows that he has enlarged his vision of the Jewish lineage to embrace not only individual generations but also the individual *acts* of generation through which the lineage has been carried forward through time.

This exacting analysis indicates that Origen does indeed find typological significance in each individual link in the ancestral chain and not simply in a generically conceived principle of bodily descent. The *akolouthia* of the text, in which the anagogical sense is grounded, fully exploits the *akolouthia* of the bodily lineage. Similarly, for Origen the anagogical structure of this lineage becomes a type of the anagogical structure of Scripture itself, a judgement borne out by Origen's complex play on words reflected in these three passages:

(1) And when we think of the extraordinary promises recorded about [Israel and Judah] . . . is it not clear that they demand a mystical anagogy (*ἀναγωγῆς μυστικῆς*)?;

(2) Is it not the case, then, that the bodily Israelites trace back (*τὴν ἀναγωγὴν ἔχουσιν*) their descent to the rulers of the people . . . ?;

[115] *Princ.* 4.3.7 (*SC* 268. 368).

(3) And if Eve is interpreted by Paul as referring to the Church (*εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἀναγομένη*), it is not surprising (seeing that Cain was born of Eve and all that come after him trace back (*τὴν ἀναγωγὴν ἐχόντων*) their descent to Eve) that these two should be figures of the Church; for in the higher sense all men take their beginning from the Church.[116]

We see, then, how radical is Origen's understanding of the allegorical meaning of the act of generation. Far from being inimical to the process of spiritual interpretation, Origen has made it, in all its dimensions, to typify the act of interpretation itself. Like the 'bodily Israelites', therefore, members of the Church can 'trace back' (*τὴν ἀναγωγὴν ἐχόντων*) the structure of their own family-tree; but dissimilarly, this anagogical process will lead them ultimately back to supernatural origins.

Thus Origen is equipped with an understanding of the generative act that will allow him to invest those implied in the descent of Israel, one by one, with an exact typological function. This he does. And what do they typify except the uniquely 'higher kind'—the divine kind—of begetting that creates and perpetuates 'Israel after the spirit' (*Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ πνεῦμα*)? Origen alludes to this real analogy between spiritual and physical generation at the beginning of this section, where he writes:

For if we take the phrase 'a Jew inwardly' as a test, we shall realize that as there is a race of bodily Jews, so, too, there is a race of those who are 'Jews inwardly', the soul having acquired this nobility of race in virtue of certain unspeakable words (*κατά τινας λόγους ἀπορρήτους*).[117]

Butterworth is right to venture that 'this phrase'—i.e. (*κατά τινας λόγους ἀπορρήτους*) 'alludes to the baptismal formula',[118] a formula whose efficacy flows from a power intrinsic to the name of the Holy Trinity.[119] But clearly Origen means to suggest more than

[116] *Princ.* 4.3.6–7 (*SC* 268. 366–8). [117] *Princ.* 4.3.6–7 (*SC* 268. 366).

[118] *On First Principles*, 298 (n. 6).

[119] Interestingly, it is in another discussion (*Cels.* 4.33–4 (*SC* 136. 266–70)) of the significance of Jewish ancestry that Origen appeals even more explicitly to the power of the biblically revealed divine names to effect spiritual change. Here, against Celsus' disparaging remark that Jews dignify themselves by appealing to obscure ancestors, Origen points out that even pagans recognize the effectiveness for exorcism of the

this. Namely, he is alluding to a correspondence not only between the kinds of acts that cause a soul to be generated in a bodily lineage—or regenerated in a spiritual one—but between the media whereby these generations occurs.

Origen's argument is implicit but plain enough when viewed both in context and in view of his frequent comparisons of spiritual to physical begetting. Just as the father's *spermata* have the power to fertilize in a bodily way, so do the *logoi aporrêtoi* have the power to beget souls in a spiritual way, a reality mystically signified in the unique manner of Jacob's begetting by Isaac.[120] In the following passage from *Homily 10 on Exodus*, Origen presumes just such an exact analogy between *logos* in baptism (i.e. as spiritual generation) and *sperma* in physical generation:

'If the infant was already formed, he will give life for life' (Ex. 21: 23). The child already formed, this can be seen as the word of God (*sermo Dei*) in the heart of the soul which has attained the grace of baptism (*gratiam baptismi*), or who has conceived a word of faith (*verbum fidei*) most evident and clear.[121]

Thus, bodily seed transmits its own kind of identity (i.e. *logos*) from one generation to another. Analogously, the 'word' of baptism is seen to be a spermatic word—a true *logos spermatikos*. Again, the perfect correspondence between lower and higher, between flesh and spirit, is preserved and then used to enrich the whole reading.

In this way, then, Origen presents the reader with, on the one hand, 'Israel after the flesh' and, on the other, 'Israel after the spirit' with its 'nobility of race' (*εὐγένειαν*). Further, Origen seeks the ultimate ground of distinction between them in the meaning and manner of their begetting—the former sexual, the latter spiritual, both fully nuptial.[122] This emphasis upon sexual begetting, however, in no sense exhausts Origen's interest in the nuptial theme in this text. He has in fact brought four further significant nuptial elements to his reading of the Jewish genealogies. They are as follows:

formula 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob'. See also Dillon, 'Magical Power of Names', 212.

[120] *Princ.* 4.3.7 (*SC* 268. 368): 'and was not he born of Isaac . . . ?'

[121] *Hom. in Ex.* 10.4 (*SC* 321. 320), tr. Heine.

[122] See also *Or.* 8 (*GCS* 3. 316); *Comm. in Mt.* 17.21 (40. 643); *Hom. in Lev.* 12.7 (*SC* 287. 192–4).

(1) *paternity*: 'the God and Father (θεὸν καὶ πατέρα) of the whole world'; 'Christ . . . the father (πατρὸς) of every soul'; 'Adam . . . the father of all men (πατήρ)';[123]

(2) *maternity*: '. . . born of Eve' (ἐκ τῆς Εὔας γεγενημένου); 'all . . . carry back their descent to Eve (ἐπὶ τὴν Εὔαν)'; 'Jerusalem . . . which is our mother (Ἰερουσαλὴμ . . . μήτηρ ἡμῶν)';[124]

(3) *marriage*: 'Adam' and 'Eve'; 'Christ' and 'Church'; 'God the Father' and 'Jerusalem . . . which is our mother';[125]

(4) *familiality*: '. . . the origin of all families (ἀρχὴ πατριῶν) that are in touch with the God of the world began lower down with Christ . . .'[126]

The holism typical of Origen's conception of legitimate marriage is in plain view here, though now incorporated into the material sign of the scriptural text.[127] Origen has, by design, shaped his reading of the lineages of the bodily and spiritual Israels towards a meditation on nuptial realities. Just as his account of Romans 2: 28–9 turns upon an idea (i.e. of genealogy) applied to the text from the outside, so does he deepen his interpretation of that genealogy through a sustained use of nuptial categories. Consequently, Origen's reader must now interpret the entire lineage of 'Israel after the flesh' in and through all these forms of nuptial life that, by virtue of Origen's analysis, are now seen to suffuse it.

Of course, none of these earthly nuptial realities—paternity, maternity, begetting—emerges in Origen's reading as a wholly adequate 'type' of a spiritual nuptiality. However, he never hints that this insufficiency is total or that it is rooted in any enmity between embodied and spiritual nuptiality. Rather, it inheres in the limitation

[123] *Princ.* 4.3.7 (*SC* 268. 368).

[124] *Princ.* 4.3.7 (*SC* 268. 368).

[125] *Princ.* 4.3.7, 8 (*SC* 268. 368, 70). Origen's *Commentary on the Song* (*Cant.* 2.3 (*SC* 375. 326)) accentuates the mystical marriage of God the Father and Mother Jerusalem: 'It will, on the contrary, seem supremely apt and fitting that those for whom God is the one Father (*unus . . . Deus Pater*) should have Jerusalem for their one mother (*una . . . Hierusalem mater*)'.

[126] *Princ.* 4.3.7 (*SC* 268. 368).

[127] The only crucial aspect of married life that Origen omits in this section is nuptial *erôs*. Yet, note his creative use of Jacob's nuptial passion for Rachel (Gen. 29) as an illustration and analogue of the heavenly Bride's *erôs* for the Bridegroom, *Cant.* prol. 2.45 (*SC* 375. 122).

of the nuptial/erotic *typos* to the disparities and contingencies of the fallen world-order. For this reason, the complex matrix of truths embraced in the simple unity of spiritual nuptiality can be shown forth in this world only through several somatic, historical signs.

For example, that each Christian possesses the 'Jerusalem above' as his or her only mother while, at the same time, descending from a long line of spiritual 'mothers' and 'fathers' has for Origen a single spiritual reality. Yet, in time and space—and in the discursive structure of the texts that mirror them—this reality can be signified only through multiple signs that share no obvious common interiority: the Israelite's possession of Jerusalem as the one mother-city and the ancient inheritance through countless generations, even from Adam and Eve. This kind of insufficiency is, of course, not unique to bodily signs of a nuptial character. Indeed, it qualifies every sign whatsoever, to the extent that any and all signs only shadow forth the presence of higher intelligibilities.

'Marriages and Intercourse': Origen's allegory of Moses' marriage to the Ethiopian Woman

We need look no further than Book 2 of the *Commentary on the Song* to find a remarkable instance in which Origen maintains the symbolic coherence between the scriptural representation of a real marriage—with its sexual dimension intact—and a corresponding spiritual reality to which it points. In the section that is of interest to us, Origen searches out and expounds 'passages from the Holy Scriptures that suggested themselves' as according with the 'mystery' (*sacramentum*) of the Bride's blackness, as portrayed in Song 1: 5 ('I am black and beautiful . . .').[128] Among these, Origen numbers the story of Moses' marriage to the Ethiopian woman (Num. 12).[129] The narrative is especially well-suited to his exegetical needs, since it includes not only a bride 'who is dark or black' (*fuscam videlicet vel nigram*), but also a marriage to Moses, a personage in whom Origen routinely discerns a type of Christ as Lawgiver.[130]

[128] *Cant.* 2.1.8 (*SC* 375. 264). Throughout this chapter, Origen treats the Song text as disjunctive: 'black but beautiful'.

[129] *Cant.* 2.1.21–5 (*SC* 375. 272–4).

[130] *Cant.* 2.1.21 (*SC* 375. 272).

Origen's reading follows a predictable route. Moses comes to designate 'the spiritual Law' (*Moyses id est spiritalis lex*; i.e. Christ).[131] His marriage to the Ethiopian is an 'entering into wedlock and union' (*in nuptias et coniugium*) with the 'Church that is gathered together from among the gentiles' (*congregatae ex gentibus migrat ecclesiae*).[132] The reader should, however, notice that in developing the spiritual sense of this narrative, Origen works neither to erase its historical reality nor to obscure the bodiliness of the marriage that it describes. On the contrary, the nuptial motif is utterly essential to Origen's exegesis, and he retains its sensible character without revealing any hesitation or sense of compromise.

Thus, Moses and the Ethiopian, precisely *in* their nuptial union, are made fit to be a sign of what Origen calls here *sacramentum* or *mysterium*, that is, the 'perfect mystery' of Christ the Bridegroom and the gentile Church intimately conjoined. Indeed, Origen thinks the union of Moses and the Ethiopian to have been originally so transparent to this 'mystery' that it was visible even to Miriam and Aaron at the time. This fact, Origen proposes, should explain their otherwise baffling words—'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?' (Num. 12: 2)—which Origen thinks break the *akolouthia* of the story: '... on careful consideration the narrative here is found to lack coherence (*nec consequentiam sermo habere invenitur historicus*)'.[133] Thus he writes:

> It seems to me that, in so saying, they understood the thing Moses had done more in terms of the mystery (*secundum mysterium magis intellexisse*); they saw (*vidisse*) Moses—that is, the spiritual Law—entering now into wedlock and union with the Church that is gathered together from among the Gentiles.[134]

The expression of Miriam and Aaron, though indignant, proves their prophetic insight ('they saw') into the spiritual reality hidden within the 'thing [Moses] had done' (*quod gestum est;* i.e. his marriage). Moreover, their vision and response, actuated by the power of this nuptial 'mystery', elevates them into the higher order of spiritual meaning alongside Moses and his bride. Thus Miriam now typifies

[131] *Cant.* 2.1.23 (*SC* 375. 272). [132] Ibid.
[133] *Cant.* 2.1.22 (*SC* 375. 272). [134] Ibid.

'the forsaken Synagogue' (*synagogae derelictae formam*) while Aaron stands for 'the priesthood according to the flesh' (*qui sacerdotii carnalis tenebat imaginem*).[135] All of these things—wedlock, union, Moses, the Ethiopian, the words of Miriam and Aaron—Origen understands not only to have been historically real but also to be invested, in the narrative order of Scripture, with a true somatic sense that points even now towards the 'mystery' of Christ and his Church. It is clear, then, that Origen affirms the typological value of this narrative even while retaining its basis in material fact.

Does Origen mean to include an erotic or sexual element in the 'wedlock and union' referred to above? For the answer to this question we must turn from the *Commentary on the Song* to Origen's *Homily 6 on Numbers*, where he speaks candidly to the question.[136] He writes: 'Thus God renders his judgment concerning this matter and confirms the marriage of the Ethiopian woman and permits Moses freely to dwell and to lie with her.'[137] That God granted Moses the freedom to share not only the same dwelling but the same bed with the Ethiopian is a clear allusion to their sexual as well as domestic union. Origen has, moreover, interjected this apparent *non sequitur* into his explanation of Miriam's leprosy and her expulsion from the camp along with Aaron.

From this surprising introduction of a sexual as well as nuptial motif, then, we may draw two inferences. First, Origen shows no reluctance to draw the subject of sexual experience into his discourse and to develop it as a positive homiletical point, laying it before the imagination of his listeners; this is a move that many preachers today would be unwilling to make. Second, having introduced it so unexpectedly, Origen imputes a theological and typological value to Moses' intercourse with the Ethiopian.

Origen's rhetorical design is to underscore the striking *chiaroscuro* that exists between new and old covenant realities by contrasting the experience of Moses and the Ethiopian with that of Aaron and Miriam.[138] The former choose righteously while the latter reject

[135] *Cant.* 2.1.23 (*SC* 375. 272).

[136] *Hom. in Num.* 6.4 (*SC* 415. 156–60).

[137] 'Iudicat ergo de his Deus et nuptias Aethiopissae confirmat et Moysen quidem libenter cum ea habitare sinit ac requiescere . . .', *Hom. in Num.* 6.4.2 (*SC* 415. 158).

[138] *Hom. in Num.* 6.4.2 (*SC* 415. 158).

God's evident new and fitting designs, and in so doing become signs of a much greater opposition of choices and consequences. Thus, whereas God permits Moses freely (*libenter*) to 'go into' his new bride (in both senses conveyed by *habitare* and *requiescere*),[139] he expels Aaron and Miriam from the camp. Similarly, God afflicts Miriam with leprosy, a fact that Origen almost certainly means his reader to compare ironically with the beauty of the Bride; whereas the Bride is 'black but beautiful', Miriam is stricken with a disease that makes her body white but repulsive (Num. 12: 10).

Both symbolic inversions (expulsion vs. inclusion; white but loathsome vs. black but beautiful) highlight the judgment under which Israel now stands and the blessings that Gentiles now enjoy in Christ. The sign of Gentile inclusion and blessing, then, is raised to its greatest intensity in the sexual union of Moses with the Ethiopian. For Origen can imagine no greater 'mode of inclusion', at least in this earthly life, than that by which the Christian wife is made 'one flesh' with her husband. Indeed, in this bodily and earthly union, Origen finds an earthly analogue not only of the bodily Incarnation (whereby the Word becomes 'one flesh' with his body) but also of the union that the Word establishes as 'one spirit' with the soul (e.g. the 'soul of Jesus' or the human soul).[140] Thus when Moses 'freely dwells and lies' with the Ethiopian, enjoying there what Origen elsewhere calls the 'ineffable mysteries of marriage',[141] he enacts in an historical and bodily way the entrance of Bridegroom and Bride into their heavenly *cubiculum*, wherein they enact in an eternal and spiritual way the 'perfect mystery' of nuptial union.

We come now to the most provocative dimension of Origen's reading of this story. Origen does not rest with granting a typological value to the marriage and sexual congress of Moses and the Ethiopian, as important as this step may be. He goes further, elevating

[139] Origen's use of the word 'freely' (*libenter*) should not be overlooked here. It emphasizes the licitness of Moses' marriage and hence indicates to his listeners that marriage is a true good approved by God's call. See also *Comm. in I Cor.* frag. 37, *JTS* 9 (1908), 507; and *Cels.* 8.55–6 (*SC* 150. 298–302).

[140] *Princ.* 2.6.3 (*SC* 252. 314–16). See also R. Williams, 'Origen on the Soul of Jesus', in *Origeniana Tertia*, 131–7.

[141] *Or.* 2.2 (GCS 3. 300).

Moses' earthly 'wedlock and union' to the status of his greatest single deed:

(1) Moreover, Moses himself, in spite of all the great and splendid achievements (*cum tanta et tam magnifica eius opera*) of faith and patience that are recorded of him, was never so highly praised by God (*numquam tantis a Deo elatus est laudibus*) as on this occasion when he took an Ethiopian wife (*ut nunc, cum Aethiopissam accepit uxorem*).[142]

(2) Moses was found worthy (*Moyses audire meruit*) to hear all these things (*haec omnia*) from the Lord, because of his marriage with the Ethiopian woman (*pro coniugio Aethiopissae*).[143]

Moses' marriage, Origen suggests, was an 'achievement' (*opus*) of such great prophetic 'faith and patience' that it was the cause (*pro coniugio*—'*because* of his marriage') of his highest merit in God's eyes, making him worthy of special divine 'praise' (*laus*).[144] This marriage—the unity of which, we must not forget, has been fulfilled in a sexual union—is Moses' supreme prophetic demonstration. The burning bush, the crossing of the Red Sea, the reception of the Law on Sinai—none of these, Origen claims, equals the value or power of Moses' historical wedlock and union.

We see, then, that the corporeality of this union between Moses and his Ethiopian bride does not, on Origen's reading, stand in tension with the spiritual reality towards which the story points. On the contrary, it is directly analogous to it. If there is any semiotic tension to be discerned, Origen will locate it not in its bodiliness per se, but in the historicity of the nuptial bond (for it separates them from eternity), in the fallen corporeality of their nuptial union (for it prevents the couple from enjoying perfect union and co-inhabitation), and finally in the simple fact that these two are not themselves Christ and his Bride.

It is not, therefore, the nuptial union that falls short of the mystery that it typifies but rather the ontological conditions under which it occurs. And, in fact, it is for Origen these conditions—the separation of the lower from the higher, the spiritual from the corporeal—that

[142] *Cant.* 2.1.24 (*SC* 375. 274).

[143] 'Haec omnia pro coniugio Aethiopissae Moyses audire meruit a Domino', *Cant.* 2.1.24 (*SC* 375. 274); Lawson, 97 (emended).

[144] Num. 12: 6–8.

the nuptial mystery itself primarily aims to repair. Nevertheless, to the extent that this union, even in its corporeality, is already oriented towards the mystery of Christ and his Bride, it already shares concretely in the nuptial mystery itself.

Ultimately, this last point is the most important for us to take away from Origen's reading of this story of Moses and his black bride. For it proves that Origen does not conceive of the nuptial 'mystery' bodied forth in the history of this couple finally to be something distinct, or even different, from the 'perfect mystery' presented in plain lineament by the Song. Rather, Origen writes not merely of the similarity of these mysteries but of their identity:

> Now, however, let it suffice to demonstrate from these things that this 'black and beautiful' woman is one and the same as the Ethiopian who is taken in marriage by Moses—that is, by the spiritual Law, who is undoubtedly the Word of God and Christ—although the daughters of Jerusalem namely, that people and their priests, decry him and speak evil of him for so taking her.[145]

Origen's words need clarification. In saying that the Ethiopian bride of Numbers 12 and the 'black but beautiful' woman of Song 1: 5 are the same, Origen does not mean us to conclude that they are identical in a corporeal or historical sense. He has not, that is to say, forgotten that the drama enacted in the Song does not pertain to time and space, as does the story of Moses and his bride. In a very important respect, then, Moses and the Ethiopian, with their nuptial life, are different from the Song's Bridegroom and his Bride, with their own shared nuptial intimacy.

In what sense, then, does Origen think these couples, with their nuptial ways of being, are the same? The unity that Origen confers on them is to be sought in the middle term to which he appeals in the passage above—namely, the nuptial union of the spiritual Law with the gentile Church. With this middle term, Origen designates the intelligible antitype shared in common by Moses and the Ethiopian, on the one hand, and the Song's Bridegroom and Bride on the other. Thus, when Origen reads the respective biblical narratives according to their spiritual aspect—that is, as coinciding in their antitype—he sees them as possessing a convertible identity (Moses = Bridegroom,

[145] *Cant.* 2.1.25 (*SC* 375. 274).

Ethiopian = Bride), since their inhering structures are identical and their names are synonymous with reference to the nuptial antitype. The names 'Moses' and the 'Ethiopian', in other words, function as homonyms with respect to the historical narrative but as synonyms with respect to the wholly spiritual names of 'Bridegroom' and 'Bride'.

But Origen's procedure here leaves us with two important questions that bear upon his entire exposition of the Song. The first question arises upon consideration of the supreme—and, for that reason, remarkable—value Origen attaches to Moses' 'wedlock and union' with his Ethiopian bride. He can impute such an ample disclosure of the supreme nuptial mystery in the 'wedlock and union' of Moses and the Ethiopian woman, while yet preserving all of its corporeal dimensions intact, so why would he choose to exclude all 'bodiliness' from the Song even while seeking the very same nuptial mystery in it?

The second question follows upon the fact that Origen discerns no 'body' whatsoever in the Song and as a result has removed from the interior of the text that relationship between corporeal sign and spiritual mystery that forms the essential structure of every *typos,* as Origen conceives of it. Ought one to say, therefore, that Origen thinks that the story of Moses' marriage and the nuptial drama of the Song find their unity in a shared antitype ontologically prior to them both; or would it be more accurate to say that he sees the spiritual mystery that is concealed in the story of Moses and the Ethiopian as being entirely revealed in the Song?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated several crucial points. First, Origen shows neither embarrassment nor hesitation when faced with stories of marriage, sexual intimacy, begetting, or erotic passion, even when the 'literal sense' of such narratives is especially troubling or problematic (e.g. Amnon's rape of Thamar, the intercourse of Lot with his daughters). In no case does he employ a 'bodiless' hermeneutic to cope even with the most vexing difficulties

in the 'literal sense'. Indeed he takes pains—for instance, in his answer to Celsus—to prove that he does not do so; the somatic sense remains intact. Second, in many examples that we have examined, Origen builds a higher spiritual reading on the basis of a fully intact 'bodily' sense. Even where he has not pursued this option, he does not rule it out and, in fact, occasionally develops a literal and even moral reading of the narrative in such a way that the preferred allegorical trajectory is obvious (e.g. Oholah and Oholibah). In short, the spiritual meaning of each nuptial story—which has now become the true grounds for Christian action and understanding—remains intertwined with a corporeal meaning that is true, valuable, and good in its own right.

In view of these conclusions, it is unlikely that Origen has applied a 'bodiless' interpretation to the Song so as to 'mask any erotic suggestion' (Bishop) and certainly not so as to 'castrate' the text (Phipps). Yet, every formulation of the negative critique more or less explicitly assumes that Origen has invoked his hypothesis of the asomatic text, *deus ex machina*, to salvage the storyline of a nuptial drama whose literal meaning he cannot accept on various moral or ascetical grounds. The underlying flaw in this critique is that it it fails to root Origen's 'bodiless' exegesis of the Song in a rationale that is genuinely hermeneutical. What is needed is an altogether different sort of explanation, or set of explanations, that take into account the broad spectrum of authorities that Origen himself would be likely to have considered in arriving at his 'bodiless' reading.

3

Origen's Grounds for the Wholly Spiritual Reading of the Song of Songs

SEEKING A HERMENEUTICAL BASIS FOR ORIGEN'S 'BODILESS' READING OF THE SONG OF SONGS

If we cannot attribute Origen's reading of the Song as a 'bodiless' text to its nuptial and erotic figuration, we must seek in new directions for the actual basis of the unique exegesis that he develops in the *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song*. Before continuing with this investigation, however, we ought first to remind ourselves of the milieu in which Origen took up the exegesis of the Song. While it is true that Origen was himself largely responsible for setting the allegorical course taken by future Christian exegesis, his originality hardly lay in having rejected the 'literal sense' of the text. From antecedents both Jewish and Christian, Origen had inherited a legacy for which a non-literal—if perhaps more typological than allegorical—reading of the Song was already authoritative, if only embryonically conceived. Among the early Christian authorities, it was Theodore of Mopsuestia in the next century, with his literal reading of the Song as a simple human love-story, who was the great exception[1]—not Origen, who held the main with Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and above all Hippolytus.

[1] See *PG* 66, 700D, for an excerpt taken from Theodore's writings and cited in the Acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553), as evidence supporting its anathema against his rejection of an allegorical sense in the Song. D. Z. Zaharopoulos discusses Theodore's position on the Song more fully in *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of His Old Testament Exegesis* (New York, 1989), 33–4.

While Origen is a man of tradition—a man eager not to 'overpass the everlasting limits set by the fathers' (*non enim transferendi sunt termini aeterni, quos statuerunt patres*)[2]—he is also a thinker keen to demonstrate the tradition's underlying unity with the primary source of divine truth and doctrine, that is, holy Scripture. And so, just as he deduces his mainstay hermeneutical principles from Scripture itself, so will he also seek the premises of his reading of the Song in mandates and clues internal to the text itself. In other words, Origen's rationale for interpreting the Song as a 'bodiless' text is, in the final analysis, a thoroughly hermeneutical one rather than an ascetical or moral one.

In this chapter, we shall examine the hermeneutical rationale that Origen himself develops as the basis of his 'bodiless' interpretation of the Song. Our discussion will develop in two stages. First, we shall look closely at Origen's analysis of the Song's own self-definition, which he seeks principally in the title of the text. Second, we will turn to his reading of those hermeneutical markers in the Song—the textual *skandala*—that decisively prove it to be a 'bodiless' text.

THE HERMENEUTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE 'SONG OF SONGS'

The titles of biblical books as windows on their spiritual sense

The Prologue to the *Commentary on the Song* reaches its climax as Origen enters upon a searching analysis of the 'actual title of "The Song of Songs" ' (*dicere etiam de superscriptione ipsa Cantici Canticorum*).[3] This move is to be expected, since Origen's exegetical procedure always looks first to the title as one of the clearest windows upon the purpose and identity of a biblical book. In other words, for Origen, the *superscriptio* or *titulus* of the sacred text discloses its *skopos,* a fact confirmed by B. Neuschafer in his study of Origen's

[2] *Cant.* prol. 4.34 (*SC* 375. 170). [3] *Cant.* prol. 4.1 (*SC* 375. 146).

methods of philological, as distinguished from exegetical, analysis of biblical texts.[4]

In Origen's judgement, the perfect congruence of title and 'aim' in any biblical book arises from the perfect aptness and spirituality of all names in Scripture. Wherever names of any kind appear in holy Scripture (e.g. the names of places, animals, patriarchs and prophets, and of the Lord himself), they take on the same twofoldness of meaning—the dynamic, co-inhering relationship between 'letter' and 'spirit'—that is characteristic of Scripture as a whole. For Origen, the same mutual concord of letter and spirit must necessarily apply to the proper names of scriptural books. Yet, among all the names recorded in Scripture, titles have the distinctive property of belonging entirely to the order of revelation. While other scriptural names point in their literal sense to bodily or historical realities lying outside the text, the titles of biblical books refer only to the infra-canonical reality of the inspired texts themselves.

Titles, in other words, reveal the revelation. R. Barthes articulates a similar yet distinctly post-modern version of Origen's perspective:

> The function of the title has not been well studied, at least from a structural point of view. What can be said immediately is that society, for commercial motives, needing to assimilate the text to a product, a commodity, must have markers: the function of the title is to mark the beginning of the text, i.e. to constitute the text as a commodity. Thus all titles have several simultaneous meanings, at least two of which are: (1) what it utters, linked to the contingency of what follows it; and (2) the announcement itself that a piece of literature is going to follow (i.e., in fact, a commodity); in other words, the title always has a double function: as utterance and as *diexis*.[5]

Like Barthes, Origen is intensely interested in the 'structural point of view', save that where Barthes speaks of the text as 'product' and 'commodity', Origen conceives of Scripture as divine creation and gift ('. . . Scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given (δοθῆναι) for man's salvation').[6] And, Origen thinks, it is precisely the literary-grammatical structure of this gift (i.e. of the sacred text)

[4] *Origenes als Philologe,* Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumwissenschaft 18:1 (Basle, 1987), 62, 82–4.

[5] R. Barthes, 'Textual Analysis of a Tale of Poe', in Marshall Blonsky, *On Signs* (Baltimore, 1985), 87; quoted in Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides*, 37.

[6] *Princ.* 4.2.4. (*SC* 268. 312).

that guarantees its power to save, by conserving what Origen calls alternately the 'connection that exists among spiritual realities' (τὸν ἐν τοῖς πνευματικοῖς εἱρμόν)[7] or the 'sequence of intellectual truths' (τῆς περὶ τῶν νοητῶν ἀκολουθίας).[8]

These two terms—'sequence' (*akolouthia*) and 'connection' (*heirmos*)—identify two dimensions of the underlying divine 'reason' (*logos*) that structures all the *logoi* (e.g. words, phrases, concepts) of any biblical text. Thus *akolouthia* denotes the whole ordered array of *logoi*, *heirmos* their ordination as such.[9] In *On First Principles,* Origen describes this inner 'connection' and 'sequence' primarily in terms of their overt manifestation under the discursive aspects of both 'narrative' and of 'laws . . . recorded in a series (εἱρμῷ) with a power that is truly appropriate to the wisdom of God'.[10] Yet, for Origen, the principles of *akolouthia* and *heirmos* operate at every magnitude of holy Scripture, not only within books but between books. For, inasmuch as each book of Scripture is the fruition of a unique prophetic event—a crucial principle that we shall take up in Chapter 4—Origen views the whole canon of Scripture, book by book, as a living record of the Logos' revelatory dealings with his messengers.

Thus the same principles of *akolouthia* and *heirmos* at work in the narratives and laws embedded within individual biblical books must also govern the matrix in which the books themselves are embedded. In other words, Origen thinks all biblical books are rightly ordered in relation to one another, their various sequences and connections securing the pedagogical structure of the canon.[11] It is within this kind of structural view of Scripture that the titles of biblical books acquire their special significance for Origen. First, then, there is that which the title (to use Barthes's words) 'utters, linked to the contin-

[7] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336).

[8] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 338).

[9] See Dawson, 'Allegorical Reading in Origen', 34–5.

[10] *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 332–4).

[11] This structure is most obvious in the ordination of the Old Testament to the New, but is also apparent in many other sequences of biblical texts: (*a*) among the gospels ('the first-fruits of Scripture'), John is 'first-fruits among first fruits', *Jo.* 1.20 (*SC* 120bis. 66); (*b*) the sequence of the 22 books of the Old Testament, which Origen likens to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and which together form the 'elements' or 'ABCs' (*stoicheia*) of the divine pedagogy, *Philoc.* 3 (*SC* 302. 260); (*c*) the three books of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs), which comprise a curriculum in divine philosophy.

gency of what follows it'; the title shares a 'connection' (i.e. 'link') with the biblical book that allows it to show forth the book's purpose and character. Second, the title makes an 'announcement' (Barthes) that a divine gift (i.e. *δοθῆναι*)—not 'commodity'—is to follow; hence, the title will suggest to Origen precisely where the book's salvific teaching belongs in the whole divine curriculum. In short, the title of the biblical book locates the book in a 'sequence', showing how it is 'connected' soteriologically with other books.

The meaning of the title 'Song of Songs'

Concerning the importance of the titles of Solomon's three books, including the Song, Origen writes:

> We have thought fit to discuss these matters rather more carefully, because we wanted by their means to demonstrate the reason (*rationem*) why, in the very titles of his books, Solomon differentiated as necessity required (*in ipsis quoque attitulationibus librorum suorum differentiis usus est necessariis*), and signified one thing (*aliud*) in Proverbs, another (*aliud*) in Ecclesiastes, and yet another (*aliud etiam*) in the Song of Songs, as the title in each case shows (*ex ipsa inscriptione tituli designavit*).[12]

As an inspired name of a revealed book, each of these titles not only identifies the text as a single literary production—material, composed of ink and paper—but also, and more significantly, designates (*designavit*) the unique spiritual purpose (*rationem*) of the whole text. Thus, 'the title in each case shows' (*ex ipsa inscriptione tituli*) the specific difference of every biblical book 'as necessity required' (*usus est necessariis*). Origen makes no absolute distinction between what the title reveals and what the text as a whole imparts as reality. In other words, the title of a biblical book both names the text and reveals its essential character when considered as a unity of presentation. We may ask, then, what insight into the Song's identity Origen discovers in its name.

In the first instance, and most obviously, the title 'Song of Songs' tells Origen that the Song is above all a song. Even if Solomon wrote it in the form of a drama, the Song is nevertheless principally a

[12] *Cant.* prol. 4.27 (*SC* 375. 160–4).

marriage-song (i.e. epithalamium), and this epithalamic character embraces and includes all the text's dramatic features as subordinate aspects.[13] Yet the full significance of its character as song only comes to view in light of a second feature that Origen also notices in the title 'Song of Songs'. The title is not simple. It comprises a syntax, an ordered relation of *logoi* that must itself communicate meaning about the Song's very character as song. In other words, the name 'Song of Songs' (LXX: *Ἀισμα τῶν ᾀσμάτων*; *canticum canticorum*) parts with its fullest meaning only in view of what Torjesen calls the 'grammatical sense' of Origen's hermeneutic.[14]

In Hebrew, the genitive structure of the name 'Song of Songs' (*shîr ha-shîrîm*) alludes principally to the surpassing excellence of the poem—'the most excellent song'.[15] Origen upholds this sense of the title. In fact, as we argued in the introduction to this study, he finds the character of this perfection impressed deeply into the structure of the text itself. Yet, at the same time, he looks to the syntax of the title itself to explain precisely *how* the Song possesses its excellence. His theological concern for the syntax of 'Song of Songs' surfaces most conspicuously in the following two passages from the Prologue of the great *Commentary*:

(1) But let us not overlook the further fact that some people write the title of this little book as *Songs of Songs* (*attitulationem libelli huius Cantica Canticorum scribere*). That is, however, incorrect; it is called the Song of Songs in the singular, not in the plural (*non enim pluraliter, sed singulariter Canticum hic dicitur Canticorum*).[16]

(2) Let these remarks on the actual heading or title of the book (*de superscriptione ipsa libelli vel attitulatione*) suffice for introduction . . . yet—not to leave anything out—there is one other point about the title and heading of the book (*de ipsa attitulatione ac superscriptione*) that seems to some people to require investigation. For 'The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's own', is taken by these persons as meaning *the* Song of the Songs of Solomon, as though

[13] Origen locates the Song's being in its character as wedding-song, but its form or modality in drama: 'It seems to me that this song is an epithalamium . . . which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama . . .', *Cant.* prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80).

[14] *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 139.

[15] Or, as Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 293–7, suggests, 'The Sublime Song'.

[16] *Cant.* prol. 4.29 (*SC* 375. 166).

he signalized this one song among his many songs (*Sic enim accipiunt quasi Canticum hoc esse dixerit Canticorum Salmonis, ut ex pluribus suis canticis hoc unum esse signaverit*). But how shall we accept an interpretation like this (*sed nos quomodo recipiemus huiusmodo intelligentiam*) . . . For, if he had meant us to understand that this is the Song of Solomon's Songs, he would surely have said: 'The Song of the Songs that are Solomon's', or 'A Song from among the Songs of Solomon' (*Si enim voluisset intelligi Canticorum Solomonis hoc esse Canticum, dixisset utique: Canticum Canticorum, quae sunt Solomonis, vel: Canticum ex Canticis Solomonis*).[17]

The fact that Origen has troubled himself specifically to address two faulty readings of the title is significant. For it shows that he believes these readings, in particular, to imply conclusions inimical to his own understanding of the Song, and he wants to prevent the reader from coming to them through neglect or accident.

The first of these wrong readings ('Songs of Songs') implies an error that, superficially, bears merely upon the literary structure of the Song. Namely, it suggests that the Song is a sort of an anthology, a plural composite of diverse songs whose unity is only accidental.[18] Against this position, then, Origen asserts the Song's fundamental unity. What is at stake for him here is not, however, simply its narrative unity as drama; he already acknowledges that, read under its dramatic mode, the Song indeed comprises a number of diverse songs, some belonging to the Bridegroom, some to the Bride, and some to each group of their friends and companions. His concern must rather be with a unity of a different sort—a unity which

[17] *Cant.* prol. 4.29–31, 35 (*SC* 375. 166–7, 170–2).

[18] Curiously, in the opening sentences of the first homily, Jerome renders the title as 'Songs of Songs' (*cantica canticorum*) only to shift to the correct 'Song of Songs' (*canticum canticorum*) immediately upon moving to Origen's allegory of the six songs, *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (*SC* 37bis. 64–6). Origen's insistence in the *Commentary* upon the reading 'Song of Songs' makes it very unlikely that he used an erroneous form himself in this part of the first homily, particularly since he uses the correct form of the title uniformly throughout the remaining sections of both homilies. Obviously unaware of Origen's own rejection of 'Songs of Songs', Jerome has probably used the plural form of the title for stylistic reasons, so as to preserve parallelism with Origen's comparative reference to 'holies of holies' (*sancta sanctorum*) and 'sabbaths of sabbaths' (*sabbata sabbatorum*).

I propose has become a special focus because it fixes the Song in unique relation to other songs, as exemplary 'song' to 'songs'.

This possibility in particular becomes more likely in view of Origen's correction of the second wrong reading identified above. In this case, he speaks to those who read the title of the Song as limiting its horizons of significance to the works of Solomon alone. The Song, then, is neither merely (*a*) the best of Solomon's songs ('The Song of the Songs that are Solomon's'; *Canticum Canticorum, quae sunt Solomoni*) nor less (*b*) a song that happens to have been selected arbitrarily from among them ('A Song from among the Songs of Solomon'; *Canticum ex Canticis Solomonis*). Rather, Origen thinks, we will appreciate the true significance of 'Song of Songs' only when we view it against a broader horizon, ontological rather than merely historical or literary.

From the grammatical form *aliquid aliquorum* ('X of Xs'), Origen infers the metaphysical affinity that exists between an intelligible exemplar (i.e., *aliquid*) and all its less perfect copies (*aliquorum*). Or, more exactly, this form—which H. de Lubac calls Origen's 'formule à redoublement'[19]—names the exemplar itself, yet precisely in relation to those beings that participate in it. In the following passage from *Against Celsus*, Origen formulates this ontological, participative sense of the form *aliquid aliquorum* in express terms. After asserting (in harmony with Plato)[20] that 'God does not even participate in being',[21] he goes on to concede that:

> ... there is much to say which is hard to perceive about being, and especially if we take 'being' in the strict sense to be unmoved and incorporeal (*πολὺς δ' ὁ περὶ τῆς οὐσίας λόγος καὶ δυσθεώρητος καὶ μάλιστα, ἐὰν ᾖ κυρίως οὐσία ἡ ἑστῶσα καὶ ἀσώματος*). We would have to discover whether God 'transcends being in rank and power', and grants a share in being to those whose participation is according to His Logos (*μεταδιδοὺς οὐσίας οἷς μεταδίδωσι κατὰ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λόγον*), and to the Logos himself (*καὶ αὐτῷ λόγῳ*), or whether He is Himself being (*ἢ καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν οὐσία*), in

[19] *Histoire et Esprit*, 310.

[20] See *Rep.* 509B, where Plato proposes that Being is subordinate to the Good.

[21] H. Chadwick attributes this phrase to Celsus (*Contra Celsum*, 379). Whatever its origin, Origen immediately qualifies its sense by asserting, against Celsus, that participation in the fullest sense comes by grace rather than nature: 'For [God] is participated in, rather than participates; and He is participated in by those who possess the Spirit of God' (*ἀλλ' οὐδ' οὐσίας μετέχει ὁ θεός, μετέχεται γάρ μᾶλλον ἢ μετέχει, καὶ μετέχεται ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχόντων 'πνεῦμα θεοῦ'*), *Cels.* 6.64 (*SC* 147. 338).

spite of the fact that He is said to be invisible by nature (τῇ φύσει ἀόρατος) in the words that say of the Saviour: 'Who is the image of the invisible God' [Col. 1: 15]. That He is incorporeal (ἀσώματος) is indicated by the word 'invisible' (ἐκ τῆς 'ἀόρατου' φωνῆς). We would also inquire whether we ought to say that the only-begotten and first-born of all creation is being of beings (οὐσίαν οὐσιῶν), and idea of ideas (ἰδέαν ἰδεῶν), and beginning (ἀρχὴν), and that his Father and God transcends all these.[22]

Origen is concerned with two questions here: (1) whether God (the Father)—whom all agree does not participate in being—is himself the 'participated being' or transcends being altogether; and (2) whether the Logos participates in being or is being-as-such, in whom all beings participate, with the Father transcending all.[23] Of specific interest to us for the moment, however, is Origen's syntax of participated being. If the Logos is 'being of beings' (οὐσία οὐσιῶν), 'idea of ideas' (ἰδέα ἰδεῶν), or (Origen hints) 'beginning of beginnings' (ἀρχὴ ἀρχῶν),[24] this means that God 'grants' to creatures 'a share in being' (μεταδιδοὺς οὐσίας) or a 'participation' in being 'according to His Logos' (οἷς μεταδίδωσι κατὰ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λόγον). The form *aliquid aliquorum* becomes Origen's shorthand for expressing just this kind of exalted participation in the exemplar.

In the *Commentary* Origen strongly suggests that such a participative relation must be deduced from the title 'Song of Songs':

We must now pass on to our next point, and discuss the actual title of 'The Song of Songs'. You find a similar phrase in what were called 'the holies of holies' (*sancta sanctorum*) in the Tent of the Testimony [Ex. 30: 29], and again in the 'works of works' (*opera operum*) mentioned in the Book of Numbers [Num. 4: 47], and in what Paul [Rom. 16: 27] calls 'the ages of ages' (*saecula saeculorum*). In other treatises we have, as far as we were able, considered the difference between 'holies' (*quo different sanctis*) and 'holies of holies' (*sancta sanctorum*) in Exodus, and between 'works' (*opera*) and 'works of works' (*opera operum*) in the Book of Numbers; neither did we pass over the expres-

[22] *Cels.* 6.64 (*SC* 147. 338–40).

[23] See *Jo.* 19.37 (*SC* 290. 68): 'For one does not apprehend God or contemplate him, and afterwards apprehend the truth. First one apprehends the truth, so that in this way he may come to behold the essence (ἐπὶ τὸ ἐνιδεῖν τῇ οὐσίᾳ) or the power and nature of God beyond the essence (ἢ τῇ ὑπερέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας δυνάμει καὶ φύσει τοῦ θεοῦ).'

[24] Or, perhaps better given the context, 'principle of principles', tr. Heine, 176.

sion 'ages of ages' (*saecula saeculorum*) in the passages where it occurs. Rather than repeat ourselves, therefore, we will let those comments suffice.[25]

If the inspired syntax of Scripture denotes the uniqueness of the 'holies of holies' (*sancta sanctorum*) by its relation-in-difference to those 'holies' (*sancta*) of which it is really the exemplar, or the 'ages of ages' (*saecula saeculorum*) and 'works of works' by certain lesser 'ages' and 'works',[26] then the 'Song of Songs' invites comparison to other 'songs' subordinate to it. Since this text is the 'Song of Songs', then, the reader must realize that he will best appreciate its identity as 'song' (*asma*) to those 'songs' (*asmatôn*) to which it bears some kind of genitive—and generative—relation.

Thus, with respect to all other songs in Scripture, Origen will make the Song of Songs to be the horizon of identity itself. He shows first of all that the Song is the exemplar—the perfect model—of all songs uttered in history:

> ...if, notwithstanding, anyone is of the opinion that the prophetic utterances are to be adjudged according to their content rather than their date (*non temporibus, sed ratione pensanda sunt*), he will then add that song as well, and say that *this* song that Solomon sang is the Song of Songs not only in relation to those that were sung before it (*hoc quod Solomon cecinet Canticum esse canticorum non tantum eorum quae primus*), but also in respect of those that followed it in time (*sed et quae postmodum canenda videbantur*).[27]

But he goes on immediately to explain that the Song is also the metaphysical exemplar and prototype of all songs whatsoever. Its character is superhistorical:

> ...by assessing the virtue of each song separately and collecting from them the grades of the soul's advance (*et requirens singulorum virtutes canticorum, atque ex his proficientis animae gradus colligens*)... he will be able to show with what stately steps the Bride, as she makes her entrance, attains by way of all these to the nuptial chamber of the Bridegroom (*ostendere poterit quam magnificis gressibus incedens sponsa per haec omnia perveniat usque ad thalamum sponsi*), passing 'into the place of the wonderful tabernacle (*in locum tabernaculi admirabilis*), even to the House of God, with the voice of

[25] *Cant.* prol. 4.1–2 (*SC* 375. 146).

[26] On 'holies of holies', *Hom. in Lev.* 13.6 (*SC* 287. 222); 'works of works', *Hom. in Num.* 5.2.1 (*SC* 415. 126).

[27] *Cant.* prol. 4.13 (*SC* 375. 154–6).

joy and praise, the noise of one feasting' [Ps. 41: 15]. So she comes, as we said, even to the Bridegroom's chamber, that she may hear and speak all these things that are contained in the Song of Songs (*ut perveniens usque ad ipsum, ut diximus, thalamum sponsi, ut audiat et loquatur cuncta haec quae continentur in Cantico Canticorum*).[28]

From a purely literal view, the 'stately steps' (*magnifici gressus*) to which Origen refers are simply all the song-texts found in the 'letter' of the Bible. In this respect, then, Origen understands the title of the Song of Songs to place the divine *epithalamium* in relation to other biblical songs of which it is the exemplar. This allows him further to refine his exegetical procedure in the Prologue, where he now reads the Song in light of a sequence of six so-called 'introductory songs' (*cantica praecedentia*).[29]

Thus these six songs precisely represent—and, indeed, re-present—the 'grades of the soul's advance' (*proficientis animae gradus*) to the nuptial realities of heaven, the Song of Songs imparting those realities as perfected and attained.[30] Equally, moreover, we must understand that for Origen the sequence of biblical song-texts will also typify the whole anagogical 'way' (*hodos*) that leads from 'letter' to 'spirit'. According to Origen, the Bride's path also leads upwards and into (i.e. *pros anagoge*) the spiritual dimensions of Scripture towards an eternal *telos*, in which the Song, the Bridegroom's eschatological wedding-chamber (*thalamum*), and the 'wonderful tabernacle' (*tabernaculum admirabile*) somehow coincide. The *cantica* that form the *magnifici gressus* and *proficientis gradus* of this path can only be spiritual songs—'songs' comprising the whole sense of holy writ.

We must also appreciate to what limits Origen presses the very idea of 'song'. For inasmuch as 'songs' are represented, named, and recorded in Scripture itself, to Origen's mind they can never be *mere* songs, whether instrumental or vocal. Their own biblical *logos* or name, precisely as 'song', will point Origen beyond any human melodies to certain soundless spiritual 'songs' of the spiritual sense.

[28] *Cant.* prol. 4.14 (*SC* 375. 156).

[29] *Cant.* prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 148).

[30] We shall return to the structure of this song-sequence in Chapter 5, where we shall see its relevance to Origen for establishing the eschatological setting of the Song of Songs.

He finds in the order of music and song an intense likeness to the order of spirit and spiritual understandings. Music—beautifully structured, harmonious and intellective, yet transcending words—intimates to him the higher virtualities of God's mind, so much so that the word 'song' itself names the mystical or spiritual meaning of Scripture.

In an important passage from the *Commentary on Matthew* (on Matt. 5: 9), now preserved only in the *Philocalia*,[31] Origen compares the whole canon to a perfectly tuned lyre. To interpret Scripture well, he tells us, is to play this instrument as an expert musician, skilled in drawing forth a true melody from many strings:

> For he knows all Scripture to be the one perfect and attuned musical instrument of God, producing from various sounds a single saving melody for those willing to learn, assuaging and arresting all activity of the evil spirit, as the music of David stilled the evil spirit that was choking Saul.[32]

The spirit of Scripture is the music (*ἡ μουσική*) of the text. Or, more precisely, the spirit of Scripture is the hidden unity of its constitutive texts, manifest in the harmony (*ἁρμονία*) of a 'single sound' that yet contains many notes. The 'song' of Scripture is its objective inspiration.

Earlier fathers had already used the musical metaphor to describe the prophetic inspiration of the Scriptures, but Origen has shifted its centre in a way that calls attention to the cooperative activity of the prophet and the reader in the production of the text and its interpretation. In Justin Martyr, for example, the metaphor of the lyre illustrates the process of inspiration, yet not of the Scriptural texts as such, but rather of the prophet's soul tuned and played by the Holy Spirit;[33] similarly Athenagoras speaks of the prophet as the 'pipe' (*αὐλός*) through which the 'piper' (*αὐλητής*)—the Spirit—breathes

[31] *Philoc.* 6 (*SC* 302. 308–10).

[32] *Ἑν γὰρ οἶδεν τὸ τέλειον καὶ ἡρμοσμένον ὄργανον τοῦ θεοῦ εἶναι πᾶσαν τὴν γραφήν, μίαν ἀποτελοῦν ἐκ διαφόρων φθόγγων σωτήριον τοῖς μανθάνειν ἐθέλουσι φωνήν, καταπαύουσαν καὶ κωλύουσαν ἐνέργειαν πᾶσαν πονηροῦ πνεύματος, ὡς κατέπαυσεν ἡ Δαυείδ μουσικὴ τὸ ἐν τῷ Σαοὺλ πονηρὸν πνεῦμα καὶ πνῖγον αὐτόν*, *Philoc.* 6.2 (*SC* 302. 310).

[33] *Dial.* 7.1–2, in *An Early Christian Philosopher: Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho, Chapters One to Nine*, ed. J. C. M. Van Winden (Leiden, 1971), 14.

his melody.[34] Both metaphors assume the passivity of the prophetic 'instrument'. In Origen's metaphor, by contrast, it is Scripture that is the instrument of God (*ὄργανον τοῦ θεοῦ*), while prophet and reader together 'play' under the Spirit's guidance, striking the chords of the text in rightly measured time to assuage the restless spirit.[35]

Origen does not exclude the subjective pole from his 'musical' construction of inspiration and exegesis. If by the 'music' and 'harmony' of Scripture—its 'single sound of salvation' (*μίαν σωτήριον φωνήν*)—Origen betokens what we may call the 'objective immanence' of *pneuma* to the biblical text, he likewise names as 'song' the 'subjective immanence' of *pneuma* to the reader's mind and soul. When the human spirit, led by the Holy Spirit, discovers the 'spirit' in Scripture, it finds a meaning that must be performed to be fully understood. Thus, in his *Commentary on Psalms,* he writes:

Even if you do not know how you can give thanks to God in a worthy manner, you should still exult with the clear voice of a singing heart which soars above the signs of doubtful letters and express the mysterious and inexpressible despite the confusion of interpretations. If you soar above the sounds of the words, if you keep within you the proclamation made with the mouth, if you can sing praise to God with just the spirit, your spirit, which does not know how to express its movements in words, because the word in you cannot carry the inexpressible and divine meaning of the Spirit—then you are singing praise to God.[36]

Origen is explicitly concerned here with teaching his reader how to appropriate the psalms for giving thanks and praise to God. Yet he is

[34] *Leg.* 9.1 (*SC* 379. 98).

[35] David's free and rational voice, carried on song, pacifies the irrational demon that is physically choking Saul's capacity for the free expression of praise. See P. Cox Miller, 'Poetic Words, Abysmal Words: Reflections on Origen's Hermeneutics', in Kannengieser and Petersen (eds.) *Origen of Alexandria*, 171; see also M. Harl's extensive discussion in *Philoc.* (*SC* 302. 313–21), esp. her remarks on Origen's perception of the spiritual meaning of the text as the 'music of God' (pp. 319–20) and on exegesis as the 'musical art of God' (p. 321).

[36] *Κἄν εὐπορῇς λέγων τῶν κατ' ἀξίαν ἀποδοθησομένων τῷ θεῷ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, ἀλάλαζε εὐσήμῳ φωνῇ καρδίας κεκραγυίας, ὑπερβαινούσης τὰ σημαινόμενα ἀπορούσης λέξεως, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἀπορίαν τῶν λέξεων ἀπόρρητα καὶ ἄρρητα λαλούσης.᾿Εὰν γὰρ ἀναβῇς τὰ λεκτὰ, ἐὰν ὑπέρβῇς τὰ ἐπαγγελλόμενα, τὰ διὰ στόματος φωνούμενα, καὶ μόνῳ νῷ δυνηθῇς ὑμνεῖν τὸν θεὸν, τῷ ἀποροῦντι ἐπιθεῖναι ἑαυτοῦ κινήματα τῷ λόγῳ παρὰ τὸ τὸν λόγον τὸνἐν σοὶ μὴ δύνασθαι βαστάζειν τοῦνοῦ νοῦ τὰ ἀπόρρητα καὶ τὰ θεῖα, ἀλαλάξεις τῷ θεῷ* . . ., *Comm. in Ps.* frag. 80.1 (J. B. Pitra, *Analecta Sacra*, 3, 135), cited in H. U. von Balthasar, *Spirit and Fire,* tr. R. J. Daly (Washington, DC, 1984), 107.

more centrally focused on what in view of the Psalms he calls 'singing' (*ὑμνέω*; *ἀλαλάζω*). The 'singing' that he praises so highly here is not an activity of the bodily voice but of the 'voice of [the] heart' (*ἡ φωνή καρδίας*). While this 'voice' does not contradict the reader's spoken confession ('proclamation made with the mouth'; *τά διὰ στόματος φωνούμενα*), it nevertheless remains wholly interior to the 'singer'. It is an expression of the spirit alone (*μόνῳ νῷ*).

For Origen, the spiritual character of this 'singing' activity requires an analogous spirituality in the song, inasmuch as a song and its performance are really indistinguishable. The song that is brought forth by the spirit must itself be spirit. When it reads the biblical score faithfully, then, what the spirit 'sings'—its spiritual song—is nothing other than the 'spirit' of Scripture itself, which Origen identifies plainly here as 'the inexpressible and divine meaning of the Spirit' (*τοῦ νοῦ τὰ ἀπόρρητα καὶ τὰ θεῖα*). Hence, inasmuch as it designates the perfect and exemplary song, the title of the text with which we are principally concerned—the 'Song of Songs'—names the spiritual sense, conveyed by the Holy Spirit to the spirit of the exultant human being.[37]

Consequently, Origen teaches that the 'song' imparted to the soul by Scripture empowers the believer to 'soar above' (*ἀναβαίνω*) whatever in the text is bodily or historical. The soul's 'song', then, is not merely the finished spiritual interpretation of the biblical text, such as could be fixed on the page. It is, rather, the soul's living discovery of the 'spirit' as the ideal altitude for its flight to the ultimacies of Scripture, which remain ever 'mysterious and inexpressible' (*ἀπόρρητα καὶ ἄρρητα*). It is significant that in his exegesis of the Song, Origen also ascribes this same kind of soaring flight to the spirit of the Bride, who is herself the Bridegroom's 'dove' (Song 2: 10):

> ... so also those who receive the power of the Holy Spirit and are sanctified by Him and filled with His gifts, themselves become doves (*ipsi columbae*

[37] The principle that there exists a fundamental correspondence between the rational structures of language and of music was already enshrined in the Greek *paideia*, which inculcated a mutually reinforcing study of grammar (under the *γραμματιστής*) and music (under the *κιθαριστής*). The *logos*-character of song, recognized by the Greeks, acquires a theological significance in Origen—hence the (divine) Logos-character of 'song' (as 'spirit') and the pre-eminent Logos-character of the 'Song of Songs'. For a discussion of Origen's appropriation of this aspect of the Greek paideia, see Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes*, 39.

fiant), even as He Himself appeared in the form of a dove (*ipse in specie columbae apparuit*). And so, uplifted on the Holy Spirit's wings, they fly from earthly and corporeal places to celestial ones (*ut de terrenis et corporeis locis evolent ad caelestia pennis sancti Spiritus sublevati*).[38]

With reference to the 'song' of Scripture, then, the 'earthly and corporeal places' (*terreni et corporei loci*)—such as the dove-like Bride leaves behind in her flight to the 'celestial' (*ad caelestia*)—correspond to the inferior order of meaning that Origen calls the 'signs of doubtful letters' (*τὰ σημαινόμενα ἀπορούσης λέξεως*) and the mere 'sounds of words' (*τὰ λεκτά*), that is, the literal sense of Scripture. In its spiritual 'song', then, the reader performs what is for Origen the central hermeneutical act: the transcendence of the partiality of the literal sense and the attainment of the fullness of the 'divine meaning'.

When Origen affirms that the Song surpasses all other 'songs' in value and profitability for the soul ('Rightly, then, is this song preferred before all songs'),[39] we must recall the breadth of his conception of 'song' itself. For, if the word 'songs' denotes the 'spirit' present in manifold forms under the 'letter', then this song—precisely as the exemplary *Song of Songs*—must correspondingly denote the very principle of inspiration itself. The title 'Song of Songs', in other words, will name the 'spirit' that lies beneath and beyond the 'body' of Scripture. Truly to know the Song of Songs is to attain a consummate knowledge of Scripture, and this, as Origen affirms in the *Commentary on John*, is 'the art of arts and the science of sciences' (*ἡ τέχνη τῶν τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστήμη τῶν ἐπιστημῶν*).[40]

THE HERMENEUTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 'STUMBLING-BLOCK' IN THE SONG OF SONGS

The 'stumbling-block' as signal of 'bodilessness'

The foregoing analysis of the Song's title is meant only to bring into view the kinds of wide-ranging hermeneutical issues that Origen will

38 *Cant.* 4.1.5 (*SC* 376. 680) = Lawson (3.14), 240.
39 'Unde et omnibus canticis merito praefertur', *Cant.* prol. 4.4 (*SC* 375. 148).
40 *Jo.* 13.303 (*SC* 222. 198).

have considered in arriving at his 'bodiless' reading of the text. However strongly the title of the Song may suggest its special affinity to the 'spirit' of Scripture, Origen cannot deduce from it alone the actual hermeneutical 'bodilessness' of the text. For, the interpretative movement from title to spiritual interpretation remains an anagogical one. The foundation of this movement might, therefore, be a 'bodily' text whose title simply suggests its symbolic and figural correspondence to the underlying 'song' and 'spirit' of all Scripture. Origen's exegesis of the title, of course, makes a much stronger case for the text's 'bodilessness'. And the fact that his analysis depends upon syntactic data uncoloured by any extraneous moral and ascetical considerations strengthens our case that he finally attempts to ground the Song's 'bodilessness' in hermeneutical information alone. Nevertheless, a secure hermeneutical rationale for his asomatic reading of the Song must lie elsewhere.

The reasons for which Origen ultimately judges the Song to be 'bodiless' are fundamentally no different from those that lead him to make the same judgement of any text. Namely, he finds within, as well as circumscribing, the Song a profusion of the sort of hermeneutical signals—the *skandala* or 'stumbling-blocks'—that by their very character indicate to the reader the presence of an asomatic text. In Chapter 1, we saw that these *skandala* are, according to Origen, 'hindrances (προσκόμματα) and impossibilities (ἀδύνατα) . . . inserted in the midst of the law and the history',[41] expressions or events that, being irrational, absurd or impossible in their 'obvious' corporeal-historical sense, compel rather than simply invite an allegorical reading. The 'stumbling-block' enshrines the paradox of divine accommodation: that the Logos adapts himself to our limitations, yet always in a manner that leads—and even drives—us to search beyond them.[42]

Two categories of 'stumbling-block': the narrative and the figurative

In *On First Principles*, Origen identifies two basic categories of 'stumbling-blocks'. The first category might be described as *narrative*

[41] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336).

[42] M. Kuyama, 'The Searching Spirit: The Hermeneutical Principle in the Preface of Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*', in *Origeniana Sexta*, 434–5.

stumbling-blocks. These *skandala* are interruptions in the discursive 'sequence' (*akolouthia*) of events in biblical narratives and of commandments in biblical law:

But wherever in the narrative (ἐν τῇ διηγήσει) the accomplishment of some particular deeds . . . did not correspond with the sequence of the intellectual truths (τῆς περὶ τῶν νοητῶν ἀκολουθίας οὐχ εἵπετο), the Scripture wove into the story something which did not happen (τὸ μὴ γενόμενον), occasionally something which could not happen (μηδὲ δυνατὸν γενέσθαι) . . . A similar method can be discerned also in the law, where . . . even impossibilities (ἀδύνατα) are recorded . . . for the sake of the more skilful and inquiring readers . . . [43]

The second category we shall call *figurative stumbling-blocks*, of which G. A. Kennedy writes: 'Origen thought that many passages in the Bible were incomprehensible unless regarded as *tupoi*, or figures, to be interpreted allegorically.'[44] Such *skandala* are biblical *logoi* (i.e. words, expressions, or names), often richly metaphorical, that seem to consolidate two naturally dissimilar things in a way that is impossible or implausible. Their dissimilarities may be material (e.g. Paul's 'thorn' in the flesh); or more profoundly, they may be ontological, inhering in the disjunction between material and spiritual being (e.g. 'tree of life', 'face of God'). When found, for example, in the creation narrative, such expressions—the first three days of creation, with morning and evening, existing without sun, moon, and stars; God's planting a garden; trees that give life or knowledge of good and evil; God walking in the cool of the day—will lead any 'person of intelligence' (τίς νοῦν) to conclude that they 'are figurative expressions (τροπικῶς μηνύειν) which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history and not corporeally (διὰ δοκούσης ἱστορίας, καὶ οὐ σωματικῶς γεγενημένης)'.[45]

Origen gives important indications that it is the presence of these two kinds of *skandala*—the *narrative* and the *figurative*—which persuades him that the Song demands a 'bodiless' reading. Or, more exactly, he shows the reader how these two *skandala* together

[43] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 338).

[44] 'Christianity and Criticism', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, 1. Classical Criticism* (Cambridge, 1989), 334.

[45] *Princ.* 4.3.1 (*SC* 268. 342–6).

comprise the Song's basic structuring principles. Since the Song is made up entirely of such stumbling-blocks, the text as a whole must be interpreted asomatically. We shall now examine more closely how these narrative and figurative 'stumbling-blocks' shape Origen's 'bodiless' interpretation of the Song.

The narrative 'stumbling-block' in the Song of Songs

Origen's clearest and most direct statement on the significance of narrative 'stumbling-blocks' in the Song appears, interestingly, not in his great *Commentary* or *Homilies* but rather in the fragment of his early, small commentary preserved in the *Philocalia*. In this passage, Origen makes note of the perplexing shifts and changes typical of the dialogue exchanged by the Song's characters:

> Any one who does not understand the peculiar character of the persons in Scripture, both as regards the speakers and the persons addressed, must be much perplexed by what he reads; he will ask who is speaking, who is spoken to, and when does the speaker cease to speak. For it often happens that the same person is addressed, though a third person speaks to him; or the person addressed is no longer the same, and a different person takes up what is said, while the same person speaks. And sometimes both the speaker and the person addressed are changed; or, further, though both are unchanged, it is not clear that they are. Need I seek an illustration of each of these statements, seeing that the prophetical writings abound in such changes? In fact we have here a special, though it may be unrecognized, cause of the obscurity of Scripture. It is also the way of Scripture to jump suddenly from one discourse to another. The prophets, above all, do this, obscuring their sense and more or less confusing the reader.[46]

Among the perceived features that indicate the Song's fully mystical character, Origen points in particular to 'the peculiar character of the persons' that appear in the Song (*τὸ ἰδίωμα τῶν προσώπωντῆς γραφῆς*), notably the inexplicable movements and changes of the dramatic cast of characters. These movements, combined with sudden and confusing leaps between modes of discourse (*τὸ ταχέως μεταπηδᾷν ἀπὸ τοῦ περί τινων λόγου εἰς τὸν περὶ ἑτέρων*), are a

[46] *Philoc.* 7.1 (*SC* 302. 328), tr. Lewis, 44.

significant 'cause of the obscurity' (αἰτία τῆς ἀσαφείας) of this Scripture. Indeed, the Song seems to be knit together of episodes such as these, which defy the expectations of ordinary reason. While the compilers of the *Philocalia* have not allowed Origen to complete his argument here, his bearings are plain: a Scripture so thoroughly obscure in its seeming 'plain sense' must find its entire clarity in the mystical order. Hence the Song is entirely spiritual and demands a wholly spiritual understanding.[47]

Much of Origen's energy in developing the *sensus litteralis* of the Song is, in fact, expended on forging the narrative connections necessary if the reader is to understand the Song as the connected whole that it deeply is. The task is difficult, and Origen admits the limits of any exegete's ability to make the necessary clarifications with complete adequacy to the text. We can read it only 'according to our powers' (*pro viribus a nobis*)[48] and with such light as God sheds on this superlative 'song'; so he indicates in the *Homily 1 on the Song*:

> And when you have been through all the songs, then set your course for greater heights, so that as a fair soul with her Spouse you may sing the Song of Songs too. I am not sure how many persons are concerned in it; but as far as God has shown me in answer to your prayers (*orantibus vobis et revelante Deo*), I seem to find four characters . . .[49]

The difficulty that Origen alludes to here is that which he describes in the Philocalia passage as the 'peculiar character of the persons'. Their identity is veiled not only by the peculiar aspect under which the Song presents them (i.e. as unembodied and unidentified voices in dialogue) but also by the puzzling, unsignalled shifts of their dialogic/dramatic exchanges.

[47] Harl, *Philoc.* 7 (*SC* 302. 323–4), notes the 'problème théologique' of attribution raised for Origen by any textual confusion of persons: 'l'attribution d'un verset des psaumes ou des prophètes à Dieu le Père, ou au Fils éternel, ou au Verbe incarné, a des conséquences pour ce que l'on doit penser de Dieu, ou du Verbe divin, ou de Jésus-Christ. Le travail de l'exégète consiste en ce cas à déterminer en premier lieu le "caractère propre" (ἰδίωμα) du "personnage" (πρόσωπον) dont on rapporte les paroles (τὰ λεγόμενα).' Hence, this kind of obscurity will raise in an acute way a question that will become increasingly important for our discussion: *Who sings the Song as a whole?*

[48] *Cant.* 1.1.2 (*SC* 37. 176).

[49] *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (*SC* 37[bis]. 68).

In the *Commentary on the Song*, Origen calls our attention to several examples of these narrative *skandala*. Although he sees no need in the passage above to 'seek an illustration' of the several types of narrative 'stumbling-blocks' and obscurities that he has listed, the *Commentary* pays close attention to them. A particularly telling example—which illustrates the kind of narrative *skandalon* listed fifth in the Philocalia fragment ('It is also the way of Scripture to jump suddenly from one discourse to another')—appears in Origen's reading of Song 2: 8 ('The voice of my nephew! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills').[50] We shall look at this example briefly.

In the preceding verse (Song 2: 7), the Bride has been exhorting the maidens to 'stir up or awaken love' only when the time is right. In verse 2: 8, however, her attention seems suddenly to be captured by something new—the 'voice' of the Bridegroom (*vox fraterni mea*)[51] and the vision (*ecce*!) of his 'leaping' (*saliens*) and 'skipping' (*transiliens*)[52] towards her. The shift of the narrative's focus is so abrupt that Origen must address it:

> It is advisable for us to remind you frequently (*frequenter nos admonere*) that this little book is cast in the form of a play. The line that we have just now cited for consideration suggests something like this. The Bride was addressing herself to the maidens, the daughters of Jerusalem, when suddenly (*subito*), as from afar, she perceived the Bridegroom's voice talking with some people. Breaking off (*interruptio*) what she was saying to the maidens, therefore, she turned (*converterit*) her attention to catching whatever it was she heard, and said, 'The voice of my Nephew!'[53]

Here, then, the 'breaking off' (*interruptio*) of the Bride's discourse to the maidens signals a corresponding interruption in the narrative flow of the text. This break, then, acts as a 'stumbling-block', compelling the reader to discern by his own well-trained powers the hidden continuity between verses 2: 7 and 2: 8. The 'sudden' (*subitus*) jump from the first discourse to the second, moreover, coincides with the Bridegroom's own 'leaping' and 'skipping' towards the Bride.

[50] *Cant.* 3.11–12 (*SC* 376. 598–20) = Lawson (3.11), 205–16.
[51] *Cant.* 3.11.1 (*SC* 376. 598).
[52] *Cant.* 3.12.1 (*SC* 376. 612).
[53] *Cant.* 3.11.1 (*SC* 376. 598).

When the Bridegroom 'leaps', the text does as well. With the Bride, then, the reader must now turn his eyes to behold the Bridegroom's textual advent (i.e. as the gazelle and young stag of v. 2: 9) and prepare himself to hear the Bridegroom's call to 'arise . . . and come away' (v. 2: 10) from every bodily attachment.

Furthermore, Origen's reference to his 'frequent' (*frequenter*) reminders underscores, yet again, his constant mindfulness of the anomalous character of the dramatic narrative. For Origen, the 'stumbling-block' that we encounter in verse 2: 8 is typical of the entire text and demands that we integrate this single apparent incoherence with all the seeming discontinuities that comprise the whole Song. Through such disciplined interpretation, Origen believes, we may forge a reading of the text faithful to its hidden coherence. He emphasizes this point a few paragraphs on:

> We have anticipated these things and connected (*coniunximus*) them with the preceding, so as not to leave the impression that we were disrupting the order of the play and the text of the narrative (*ne ordinem dramatis et historiae textum videremur irrumpere*).[54]

'Order' (*ordo*) and 'text' (or 'structure' = *textus*) denote the *akolouthia* or sequence of the nuptial story. A conventional, literalistic reading of this story will find ample opportunity to 'disrupt' (*irrumpere*) the Song's well-ordered structure. The discerning exegete, by contrast, will strive to make this structure manifest through a process of 'connecting' (*coniungo*) one meaning with another, knowing that the inspiration of the Song guarantees its harmony with the thoroughgoing rationality of the divine Logos.

Another fine illustration of narrative *skandalon*, one characteristic of Origen's treatment of the whole text, occurs at the end of his elaboration of the *sensus literalis* of Song 2: 13b–14. He first works to show how this verse coheres with the *akolouthia* of the ongoing drama (i.e. 'in the sequence of the drama before us'; *secundum propositi dramatis ordinem*).[55] But, after attempting to unpuzzle both the verse's 'literal sense' as well as its narrative relationship to the preceding action, he concludes:

[54] *Cant.* 3.11.9 (*SC* 376, 602–3).

[55] *Cant.* 4.2.1 (*SC* 376. 698) = Lawson (3.15), 246.

But these things seem to me to afford no profit to the readers as far as the story goes; nor do they maintain any continuous narrative such as we find in other Scripture stories. It is necessary, therefore, rather to give them all a spiritual meaning.[56]

All the keynotes of Origen's doctrine of the narrative *skandalon* and its hermeneutical implications for the 'bodilessness' of the Song are summarized here. He emphasizes the lack of usefulness ('afford no profit'; *nullam utilitatem conferre*) in a sensible-historical reading of the story. He indicates the absence of *akolouthia* in the superficial narrative ('nor do they maintain any continuous narrative'; *aut aliquam saltem narrationis ipsius servare consequentiam*). Both of these features, then, require by dint of the hermeneutical logic of Scripture that the reader 'give them all a spiritual meaning' (*cuncta ad spiritalem transferre intelligentiam*).

Origen implies that these judgements apply to the whole Song and not merely to this isolated verse or some collection of isolated verses in the text. The impossibility of giving this verse a corporeal sense lies not only in the fact that it has no internal coherence but also in that it has no obvious coherence with what comes before and after it in the text. These other verses, in turn, are riddled with similar incoherences, in a way that qualifies the Song as a 'bodiless' text in its entirety. Hence, Origen concludes, whereas 'other Scripture stories' (*ceterae Scripturae historiae*) maintain a continuous narrative and profit the reader 'as far as the story goes' (*quantum ad historicam narrationem pertinet*), the Song—precisely in its unity as an *historia*—finds its coherence and usefulness entirely in the order of intellectual truths.

Most significantly, Origen sets this position forth as a necessary (*necesse est*) deduction from the textual structure of the Song itself. He does not fall back upon anti-corporeal sentiment or insinuate any moral qualms in the course of forming his judgement. Whether or not we agree with Origen's premises, his conclusion that the Song is 'bodiless' proceeds from a clearly defined hermeneutical rationale that appeals to the text alone for its persuasiveness.

[56] 'Sed haec nullam mihi videntur, quantum ad historicam narrationem pertinet, utilitatem conferre legentibus aut aliquam saltem narrationis ipsius servare consequentiam, sicut in ceteris Scripturae historiis invenimus. Unde necesse est cuncta ad spiritalem transferre intelligentiam', *Cant.* 4.2.4 (*SC* 376. 700).

The figurative 'stumbling-block' in the Song of Songs

In the preceding section, we have seen that Origen views the whole Song as an extended series of narrative discontinuities. The sequence (*akolouthia*) of the text is forged from logical connections (*heirmoi*) that are 'stumbling-blocks' to any reader whose intellect is conditioned to think in corporeal terms. For the spiritually minded exegete, these *heirmoi* may become anagogical stepping-stones to the higher logic of the Song's true spiritual narrative.

It is not, however, only the discursive connections between the structured elements of the narrative (e.g. events, verses, phrases, words) but also the elements themselves that act as *skandala* in the Song. In other words, the metaphorical language—that is, the figurative *logoi*—in which the narrative is couched is itself constituted in a way that mandates a 'bodiless' reading. According to Origen, then, the whole Song is woven of 'bodiless' (i.e. figurative) expressions bound together by 'bodiless' (i.e. purely spiritual) connections.

The structure of much of the Song's surface figuration readily explains its susceptibility to Origen's 'bodiless' hermeneutic. Such figures are characterized by an intensity of metaphorical expression that makes an overtly 'literal' reading impossible and absurd. In the Song, such intense metaphors may juxtapose two unlike corporeal or sensible images in a way that makes a 'bodily' reading of the whole figure impossible (e.g. the Bridegroom's breasts; his name as ointment).[57] Or they may attribute novel properties to natural things (e.g., the sun 'looking down on' rather than 'at' the Bride). We have already surveyed a number of such 'bodiless' figures in Chapter 1.

Origen has received strong negative criticism for reading much of the Scripture's most vividly figural language, on first approach, as anomalous and hence as demanding a 'bodiless' interpretation. We read in D. Turner's *Eros and Allegory* a representative formulation of this critique:

> There is, after all, scarcely a hermeneutical problem, but only a literary one, with someone who cannot understand 'the tree of life', 'the face of God', or references to God taking an afternoon stroll, as metaphors. But Origen

[57] For these examples, see *Cant.* 1.2 (*SC* 375. 190–204); 1.4 (*SC* 375. 220–38); *Cant.* 2.2 (*SC* 375. 298–313).

seems insensitive to the distinction between the kind of textual anomaly that demands the hermeneutical solution of allegory and a literary anomaly which derives simply from a perverse blindness to metaphor.[58]

In Turner's view, Origen's whole reading of the Song, and especially of its erotic motifs, simply manifests his prior commitment to 'metaphoricism'. That is to say, Origen mistakes simple metaphor for an expression truly patient of the allegorical solution.

In a sense, Turner has merely faulted Origen for not holding a modern view of texts. In its own context, however, Origen's particular style of 'metaphoricism' at the very least provided a coherent response to a sizeable body of 'simple' Christians as well as heretics and unbelievers (e.g., materialists, anthropomorphists, Gnostics and Jews) for whom neat distinctions between literal language and metaphorical expressions like 'the tree of life' and 'the face of God' were as untenable as they were for Origen. And, ironically, Origen supposes just such persons as these to suffer from their own kind of 'perverse blindness'—an occlusion of the spiritual eye—to the subtle coruscation of the prophetic dialect. Even if Origen's response swings to the other extreme, the sympathetic modern reader may at least be forgiven for admiring its elegance.[59]

Turner also ignores the fact that in his own time Origen was himself far from being an anomaly in his so-called 'metaphoricism'. With respect to the whole question of metaphor, we must not forget that even the most sophisticated literary critics and rhetoricians of antiquity perceived a tissue of practical and theoretical problems in the character of metaphor itself. Hermogenes, like Longinus, discourages the use of bold metaphors (e.g. 'vultures, living tombs') because they upset the solemnity of formal oratory; but, more than this, he hesitates over metaphor because its use savours of the verbal fraud of the sophists.[60] Metaphor, when indulged in wantonly, lures

58 *Eros and Allegory*, 95–6.

59 J. D. Wilkinson observes, 'In any judgement of Origen's allegory we must therefore take into account not merely the method he has chosen. We must see what he is trying to do, and the context in which he does it. For to criticise an allegory is to criticise a man' ('A Defence of Origenist Allegory', in *Texte und Untersuchungen* 81 = *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962), 265).

60 For discussion of Hermogenes and Longinus on the appropriate uses of metaphor, see D. A. Russell, 'Greek Criticism of the Empire', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 1. *Classical Criticism* (Cambridge, 1989), 315–16.

the speaker and hearer together from the plain lineaments of truth, habituating the mind to false similitudes.

It is this same suspicion of metaphor that leads Plato to his dim view of the poetic arts, for notwithstanding their divine patronage, they all too easily entrance the reader without rewarding him with the fullest possible share of truth.[61] While Aristotle encourages the mnemonic use of metaphor, he also advises that it ought never to be allowed to exceed the mean between prose and poetry.[62] Bold metaphor shades too easily into duplicity, stripping it of the pedagogical value that is its principal justification.[63]

With none of these ancient thinkers, including Origen, is the value of a metaphor calculated naively by a simple formula of substitution, such that $\text{metaphor}_a = \text{literal meaning}_b$. Rather, its effect is that of what came eventually to be known in late classical and medieval rhetoric as *enargeia*, a 'vivid, sensuous word-painting',[64] as M. Carruthers puts it, which at its best serves the educative interests of the authors: 'A primary use of ornament even in Roman rhetoric, in short, is to slow us down, make us concentrate, set up moments of meditation—and so to help us think and remember.'[65] The metaphor—the verbal ornament—retains its power precisely because it signifies (Aristotle, *σημαίνειν*) a surplus of meaning and memorableness that its prosaic equivalent never could. For Origen, as for these others, metaphors and figures are potent precisely because they call forth the activity of the soul's imaginative power to illuminate the character of one being in light of another in memorable ways.

From Origen's point of view the interpretation of even the simplest metaphor is much more than a 'only a literary [problem]'. This is true precisely for the reason that every metaphorical reading demands an epistemological and therefore hermeneutical (*contra* Turner) leap between different beings and their attributes—not to

61 *Phaedrus* 245A.

62 *Rhet.* 3.1404b26–37. See also G. A. Kennedy, 'The Evolution of a Theory of Artistic Prose', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 1. *Classical Criticism* (Cambridge, 1989), 190–4.

63 *Rhet.* 3.1410b10–13.

64 *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 34 (Cambridge, 1998), 130.

65 Ibid. 131.

mention a selection from among all their possible points of similarity—before the metaphor or figure will surrender its meaning.[66] Such interpretative moves are, of course, commonplace in any modern reading that tries to correlate biblical modes of expression with contemporary realities. As J. D. Wilkinson astutely observes, 'Even if we do not admire [Origen] we must use his method. For if the Bible was written altogether for our sake, if we are to link it with our own life as Christians, we are bound to do so by analogy. And more often than we care to admit this will be no more than allegory.'[67]

ORIGEN'S ANALYSIS OF 'BODILESS' FIGURATION IN THE SONG OF SONGS

'Likenesses of gold': figures of figuration in Song of Songs 1: 11–12a

Given the central role played by figurative *skandala* in his 'bodiless' reading of the Song of Songs, it is not surprising that one of Origen's most intensive studies of the idea of biblical figuration appears in the great *Commentary* itself, namely, in his exegesis of Song 1: 11–12a ('We will make you likenesses of gold (*similitudines auri*) with silver inlays (*cum distinctionibus argenti*), until the King recline at His table.')[68] Here, in Book 2.8,[69] Origen interprets the metallurgical artistry of the Bridegroom's friends as the skill with which the prophets have crafted anagogical figuration of Scripture:

They show that they themselves are going to make for the Bride not gold (*faciant sponsae non aurum*), for they possess none worthy to be given her, but in the place of gold they promise to make her *likenesses* of gold (*sed pro auro similitudines auri facere se promittunt*), and not one alone, but many. So they speak also of silver, implying that they have that, but only a small quantity of it; for they promise to make her out of silver not likenesses, but

[66] Wilkinson, 'A Defence of Origenist Allegory', 265.

[67] Ibid. 268.

[68] NRSV 'We will make you ornaments of gold, studded with silver./While the king is on his couch ...'

[69] *Cant.* 2.8 (*SC* 375. 406–32).

'inlays'. They do not possess enough silver to make a complete solid article of that alone, so they would put only inlays and some little things, like dots, into the thing that they were making for her out of the likeness of gold (*utpote quibus non tanta abundaret argenti materia ut connexum aliquid et solidum ex eo producere opus possent, sed distinctiones solas ac signa quaedam parva velut puncta intersererent illi operi quod ei ex auri similitudine faciebant*). These, then, are the ornaments (*ornamenta*) which the Bridegroom's friends, of whom we spoke just now, are making for the Bride.[70]

Origen thinks it significant that Song 1: 11 has 'likenesses of gold' (*similitudines auri* = LXX *ὁμοιώματα χρυσίου ποιήσομεν*) rather than 'golden likenesses' (*similitudines aureae*). For, both the words and the genitive structure of 'likenesses of gold' suggest to him an important similarity to another expression found in Hebrews 9: 24—'patterns of the true' (Ruf. *exemplaria verorum* = Gr. NT *ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν*/Vg. *similitudo verorum*).[71]

This syntactic correspondence between 'likenesses of gold' and 'patterns of the true' provides Origen with the key to the spiritual meaning of the text. Rather than naming an artifact forged of gold, the expression *similitudines auri* means 'similitudes that are like unto gold'. It denotes all the 'likenesses' (i.e. the verbal figures and *typoi* of Scripture) that point to the 'true gold' (*aurum verum*).[72] This *aurum verum*, moreover, is not only 'the unseen and incorporeal things that are in heaven' which 'are the true'[73] but more especially the Logos in which these incorporeal things subsist—'that Gold [who] came and offered Himself to be known...' (*cuius auri, antequam adesset et agnoscendum se praeberet*).[74]

In short, Origen understands 'likenesses of gold' (like 'patterns of the true' of Hebrews) to designate the figural character of all biblical language; so he explains:

We have dealt at unusual length with these matters because we wanted to show that when the Bridegroom's friends tell the Bride that they are making for her likenesses of gold inlaid with silver, they mean thereby the things that have been handed down in writing in the Law and Prophets by means of figures and

[70] *Cant.* 2.8.12 (*SC* 375. 412–14). [71] *Cant.* 2.8.18–19 (*SC* 375. 416–18).
[72] *Cant.* 2.8.17 (*SC* 375. 416).
[73] 'Ergo quae in caelis sunt invisibilia et incorporea, illa sunt vera...', *Cant.* 2.8.19 (*SC* 375. 416).
[74] *Cant.* 2.8.21 (*SC* 375. 418).

images, and likenesses and parables (*per ea scilicet quae in lege et prophetis per figuras et imagines et similitudines et parabolas scripta tradiderunt*).[75]

Origen lists a handful of such figures or 'likenesses of gold', showing how they are fulfilled in the 'true gold' of Christ and the New Covenant: the rock that gives drink, the Sea (= baptism), the cloud (= the Holy Spirit), the manna (= the Word of God), the paschal lamb (= the Saviour), the lamb's blood (= the Passion). Finally and most significantly, in the 'veil (*velum*) which is in the Holies of Holies and whereby those divine and secret things were covered', Origen sees a figure of the 'flesh' (*caro*) of Christ—not only the incarnate flesh but the textual 'flesh' or 'body' of Scripture.[76] In other words, the 'veil' or 'flesh' is what Origen earlier calls simply 'likeness (*sing.*) of gold' (*similitudo auri*),[77] that is, the principle and underlying reality of biblical figuration itself. Figuration is, simply put, the scriptural 'body' (i.e. 'letter') of the Logos (i.e. 'spirit').

In none of this discussion has Origen forgotten what we earlier called *enargeia*, the vividly ornamental function of biblical figuration. On the contrary, he specifically describes the 'likenesses of gold with silver inlays' as the Bride's 'ornaments' (*ornamenta*). Beautiful in themselves, the figural *logoi* of Scripture beautify the Bride in preparation for her perfect union with the Bridegroom. According to Origen, the *ornamenta* or *similitudines* of Scripture, as images of the true, accomplish this beautification in two ways. In so far as they are *beautiful* images of the true, they adorn her by means of teaching (e.g. 'instructed by means of likenesses and taught . . . by parables and patterns'). In so far as they are beautiful *images* of the true, they engage her (i.e. the reader's) imagination so as to awaken her desire: 'His friends made likenesses of Him for the Bride (*similitudines fecerunt sponsae amici eius*), so that she, being warned and aroused by these similitudes (*ut ex illis similitudinibus commonita et provocata*), might conceive a longing for the true gold (*veri auri desiderium caperet*).'[78] The Bride's longing being fully roused from its dormancy by figures and *similitudines*, the Bridegroom may finally—and paradoxically—come to take his ease in her heart, 'resting and reclining at His table in her' (*recubare et habere recubitum*).[79]

75 *Cant.* 2.8.23 (*SC* 375. 420).
76 *Cant.* 2.8.29 (*SC* 375. 424).
77 *Cant.* 2.8.12 (*SC* 375. 412).
78 *Cant.* 2.8.21 (*SC* 375. 418).
79 *Cant.* 2.8.39 (*SC* 375. 430).

'Silver inlays': figure of the 'bodiless' text in Song of Songs 1: 11–12a

For Origen, the power of biblical figures both to instruct and to allure is rooted fundamentally both in the sensible character of imagistic language and in the mimetic character of the human mind. Yet, he sees in this very power an interpretive danger even more grave than the tendency of *enargeia* to swell towards decadent profusion, a problem commonly acknowledged in hellenistic and medieval rhetoric. He addresses this problem in his discussion of the *similitudines auri*:

> The soul, then, is instructed by these similitudes and silver inlays are made for her while she is a child. For every now and then particles of light are shed upon the deeper mysteries for those too who are being thus instructed, so that they may conceive desire for higher things; for no one can even desire a thing of which he has no knowledge whatsoever... but, as the divine Word says, silver inlays must be made for them and some small sparks of spiritual understanding cast into their minds, so that they may somehow acquire a taste for the sweetness that is so much to be desired...[80]

The problem that Origen identifies here is what, in *On First Principles*, he describes as 'the sheer attractiveness of the language' (*τῆς λέξεως τὸ ἀγωγὸν ἄκρατον*)[81] of Scripture. The soul's imaginative faculty finds the 'likenesses', figures and metaphors so congenial to its nature—a source of such 'usefulness' (*χρήσιμον*), 'convenience' (*ἀκόλουθον*), and 'ease' (*γλαφυρόν*)[82]—that, without special prompting, it might never reach beyond its own carnality to attach its awakened desire to the spiritual realities latent within them. The divine corrective to the 'attractiveness' of biblical figuration is, as we have seen, the *skandalon* or, as Origen calls it in the above passage, the 'silver inlay'. The 'silver inlay', as *skandalon*, breaks the smooth

[80] 'In istis ergo similitudinibus imbuitur et fiunt ei parvulae distinctiones argenti. Aperiuntur enim interdum et his qui imbuuntur parva aliqua et rara de secretioribus mysteriis, ut desiderium concipiant maiorum; neque enim desiderari quid potest si penitus ignoretur... sed, ut ait Sermo divinus, faciendae sunt iis distinctiones argenti et scintillae quaedam spiritalis intelligentiae animis eorum iniciendae sunt, ut gustum quodammado desiderandae dulcedinis sumant...', *Cant.* 2.8.35–6 (*SC* 375. 428).

[81] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336).

[82] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 334).

surface of the 'likenesses of gold', interrupting the continuity of 'bodily' signification in which figuration finds its usual logic.

Origen's account of the 'silver inlay' makes much clearer the positive character of the hermeneutical 'stumbling-block' than does *On First Principles*. The 'stumbling-block' or 'silver inlay' indeed alters the surface rationality of the Scripture's figuration—but only in the way that particles of light might reveal some of the splendour of a finely wrought artifact, as the blind sense of touch cannot. The absurdity or 'impossibility' which makes the 'stumbling-block' scandalous to the ordinary reader is only a matter of appearances and, in truth, represents 'sparks of spiritual understanding' (*scintillae spiritalis intelligentiae*)[83] to the experienced reader. Thus Origen again parts company with the mainstream pagan allegorists, for whom, as Mark Edwards observes, 'the very indeterminacy of meaning is the source of the effect'.[84] In Scripture, Origen thinks, the greatest determination of meaning is conjoined with the greatest intensity of effect. Art and instruction fully coincide; in this way, holy Scripture achieves that union of beauty and truth which Plato believed impossible in poetry.

Likewise, the 'silver inlay'/'stumbling-block' does not overthrow but rather transforms the corporeal-sensible structures of biblical figuration. Origen writes:

> ... if then there be such as have been made conformable to His resurrection (*si qui fuerint conformes resurrectionis eius*), they will continue no longer in the likeness of gold, that is, in the pursuit of bodily things, but will receive the true gold from Him (*sed aurum verum ab ipso percipient*)... Now, therefore, they will use no longer little inlays of silver, but will use it copiously and freely... and countless other things will lie open to them from His resurrection, not now like a little inlay, but as spread out in all their breadth (*aliaque innumera ex resurrectione eius patebunt, non iam parva ut prius distinctione, sed latissima expositione patefacta*).[85]

The bodily resurrection of the Lord, Origen tells us, has its counterpart in a textual 'resurrection' whereby each and every figure,

[83] *Cant.* 2.8.36 (*SC* 375. 428).
[84] 'Gnostics, Greeks, and Origen', 72.
[85] *Cant.* 2.8.28 (*SC* 375. 422).

metaphor, and type of Scripture is revealed in transfigured aspect as a manifestation of Christ. The 'silver inlays' are proleptic of this christological metamorphosis of all Scripture. They are loci where the 'flesh' of the text has already been made 'conformable to His resurrection'. And, as he has already explained, the reason that the prophets have set them in the midst of the *similitudines* of Scripture is so that the reader might have some glancing knowledge both of the Truth that all the *similitudines* veil and, more especially, of the Beloved on whom he must focus the potent *erô*s that the beauty of the *similitudines* arouses.

It is clear that Origen locates the Song's uniquely acute allure in its nuptial and erotic figuration. Its danger, moreover, lies in the special intensity with which this figuration appeals to the sensible imagination, 'attractiveness' enlarging towards seduction in a text whose beautiful 'likenesses' are those which embodied human *erôs* finds most desirable indeed—namely, the bodies and love-acts of a preeminently appealing couple. Yet, this seductiveness and danger per se cannot be a sign of the Song's 'bodiless' character. For it is precisely through their 'bodiliness' that biblical figures exercise their charm upon the soul. In short, if considered only by itself, the dangerous appeal of the Song ought on Origen's terms to suggest that its nuptial figuration is more, not less, deeply rooted in corporeality than the *similitudines* of other biblical books.

THE PEDAGOGICAL FINALITY OF THE SONG OF SONGS AND THE 'BODILESS' READING

The pedagogical finality of the Song of Songs in Solomon's threefold curriculum

How, then, does Origen arrive at his 'bodiless' reading of the Song's nuptial figuration? It stands to reason that he would do so as he would with any other 'bodiless' text of Scripture, deducing its incorporeality from the presence of the figurative *skandalon* or 'silver inlay'. Yet, as we have already shown, Origen reads the whole text of the Song, at all levels of figuration, as a seamless composition of such

skandala, a continuous chain of 'silver inlays' and 'bodiless' *logoi*.[86] It would seem to follow, then, that he discerns an underlying corporeal absurdity or hindrance in the very structure of the Song's figuration. This structural anomaly makes it impossible or unreasonable, on Origen's terms, to give a 'bodily' sense to any aspect of the Song's figural language.

For reasons that we have already reviewed at length in Chapter 2, Origen cannot without grave incoherence seek the locus of the Song's figurative *skandalon*, in any unqualified way, in its underlying nuptial metaphor. Indeed, as the following passage from the Prologue shows, the hermeneutical absurdity that makes the Song's nuptial figuration to be a 'stumbling-block' does not lie in its nuptiality per se but rather in the way that the Song constructs the figure of the Bride and Bridegroom. In this passage, Origen situates the unique pedagogy of the Song within the threefold curriculum in 'divine philosophy' imparted by the books of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs).[87] He writes:

This book comes last that a man may come to it when his manner of life has been purified, and he has learnt to know the difference between things corruptible and things incorruptible (*et rerum corruptibilium atque incorruptibilium scientiam distinctionemque didicerit*); so that nothing in the metaphors used to describe and represent (*describitur et formatur*) the love of the Bride for her celestial Bridegroom (*quo in nullo . . . ex his figuris, quibus sponsae ad sponsum caelestem*)—that is, of the perfect soul for the Word of God—may cause him to stumble (*possit . . . offendi*). For, when the soul has completed these studies, by means of which it is cleansed in all its actions and habits and is led to discriminate between natural things (*et in rerum discretionem naturalium perducitur*), it is competent to proceed to dogmatic

[86] For example, Origen treats even the expressions (*a*) 'likeness of gold', and (*b*) 'silver inlay' as specialized terms for (*a*) figuration, and (*b*) the 'bodiless' *logos*, much as he uses *skandalon*, a Pauline description of the Crucified Lord (1 Cor. 1: 23), in a strictly technical, hermeneutical sense. The expression 'silver inlay', in other words, is itself a 'silver inlay'.

[87] For Origen's complete discussion of the 'Solomonic Trivium', see *Cant.* prol. 3 (*SC* 375. 128–42). He identifies the three books of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) as the original—and inspired—precursor of the Greeks' threefold philosophical curriculum in, respectively, moral science, natural science, and the 'enoptic' or 'inspective' science. For a more general and most extensive survey of Origen's pedagogical theology relative to the Greek paideia (esp. Plato and the Stoics), see Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis*, 163–304.

and mystical matters (*ad dogmatica venitur et ad mystica*), and in this way advances to the contemplation of the Godhead with pure and spiritual love (*ad divinitatis contemplationem sincero et spiritali amore conscenditur*).[88]

Origen assumes that an important category of *skandalon* in the Song—that which 'might trip up' (*possit . . . offendi*) its naive reader—is rooted in some characteristic of the Song's divinely nuptial figuration (. . . *his figuris, quibus sponsae ad sponsum caelestum*). Undoubtedly, a significant dimension of this *skandalon*'s power lies in the fact that the nuptial figure is vulnerable to a carnal interpretation by an imperfectly cleansed or even lustful reader; hence Origen's emphasis upon purity of life and of mental habitus (i.e. the training given in Proverbs) as a prerequisite for right reading.

Yet Origen stresses that moral purification by itself only partially qualifies the Christian to read the Song's figural presentation of nuptial love without stumbling. The reader must also pass through the course of studies represented in Scripture by Ecclesiastes.[89] Here he learns two related intellectual disciplines. First, he acquires the sensitivity to differentiate between corruptible and incorruptible being (*rerum corruptibilium atque incorruptibilium . . . distinctionemque*). Second, he becomes skilful in discriminating between the multitude of creatures in the natural and corruptible order of being (*in rerum discretionem naturalium*). According to Origen, both these dimensions of the 'natural science' (*disciplina naturalis*) are crucial to a correct and unerring interpretation of the Song's *figurae*. In his own intellectual career, Origen pursued them with a polymath scholar's breadth and rigour.[90]

The study of the 'natural science', therefore, does not belong simply to a curriculum of philosophical formation that furthers the attainment of 'dogmatic and mystical matters' (*dogmatica et mystica*). For Origen, it also constitutes an integral phase of a hermeneutical formation, ordered towards the study of the Song and

[88] *Cant.* prol. 3.16 (*SC* 375. 138).

[89] See esp. *Cant.* prol. 3.14–15 (*SC* 375. 136–8).

[90] According to Gregory Thaumaturgos, *Orat. Pan.* 8.111 (*SC* 148. 142), Origen added his own discoveries to the body of inherited scientific knowledge, a claim that if true, as A. Scott observes, 'would indicate that he had a curiosity about the world which was very rare in the early church', *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford, 1991), 114–15.

its nuptial figures. Ecclesiastes teaches the divine philosopher to discern between *corruptibilia* and *incorruptibilia* so that he may wisely and knowingly choose what is eternal over what is fleeting, not only in the natural order but also in the scriptural order. Origen explains:

It is for this reason that the master who first taught the divine philosophy to humans has placed at the beginning of his work the little book of Proverbs, in which, as we have said, is presented the moral science; so that, when a person has advanced in intelligence and behaviour, he might then come to the discipline of his natural intelligence and, distinguishing the causes and natures of things, there recognize the 'vanity of vanities' (*vanitatem vanitatum*) that he must relinquish and the eternals and immutables that he must pursue. And this is why, after Proverbs one comes to Ecclesiastes, which teaches, as we have said, that all visibles and corporeals are fragile and fleeting; and, surely, having known that these things are so, the one who applies himself to wisdom will undoubtedly condemn and despise them; and renouncing, as it were, the world as a whole, he will lay hold of the invisibles and eternals, which are indeed taught by spiritual meanings but hidden under certain figures of loves in the Song of Songs (*et universo, ut ita dicam, saeculo renuntians tendet ad invisibilia et aeterna, quae spiritalibus quidem sensibus, sed adopertis amorum quibusdam figuris docentur in Cantico Canticorum*).[91]

In laying aside the Vanity of Vanities, the reader readies himself to lay hold of what appear pre-eminently in the Song of Songs as 'invisibles and eternals' (*invisibilia et aeterna*). Through its spiritual meanings (*spiritalibus quidem sensibus*), the Song truly imparts these *invisibilia* and *aeterna* to those who have turned away from visible and temporal matters, preparing themselves to 'lay hold of' (*tendet*) the uniquely spiritual mode of the Song's figurative discourse (*sed adopertis amorum quibusdam figuris*). The reader's renunciation of corporeal-sensible knowledge in favour of spiritual insight (i.e. the 'enoptic' science) coincides with the final stage of his training to read the *logoi* of the Song as incorporeal 'figures of loves' (*amorum figurae*) rather than as corporeal pictures of love-acts.

[91] *Cant.* prol. 3.15 (*SC* 375. 138–9), my translation (see also Lawson, 44).

The convergence of pedagogical function and 'bodiless' form in the Song of Songs

According to Origen, therefore, the pure 'incorporeality' of these *amorum figurae* is finally demonstrated, not by their nuptial or erotic content but rather by the terminal position that the Song holds in the threefold pedagogy. R. W. Corney indicates the crucial coincidence that Origen discerns between the Song's pedagogical function and its allegorical form: 'Origen notes that Solomon wrote three books of the Bible. Two of them, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, are works intended to elucidate and inform. What would be more logical than that his third work should have been written with the same end in view?'[92] Origen finds it only reasonable to suppose that, having begun well with Proverbs in the study of moral philosophy and the science of interpretation, and having continued in Ecclesiastes to learn of the corruptibility of natural things, the Christian should discover in the Song the most suitable object for a mode of interpretation that has utterly transcended the desire to grasp at sensible meanings of any kind. To assume otherwise would be pedagogically regressive, making of the Song a most troubling exception to the divine aim that all Scripture be 'useful' to the soul's upward progress.

That the contents of the Song are themselves a tightly woven fabric of intricately constructed metaphors—natural and nuptial figures nested in superficial and deep structures—does not obscure its pedagogical finality. On the contrary, Origen understands the Song's strong figuration to manifest its ultimacy. For, the intensely figural idiom of the Song demands a maximal and expert use of each interpretative skill imparted in the first two stages of the threefold Solomonic pedagogy.

How so? In Proverbs, the Christian acquires not only moral purity but also the 'rational science'—the *disciplina rationalis*, which Origen specifically associates with hermeneutical knowledge[93]—that enables him to draw out the meaning condensed 'in short and pithy phrases' (*succinctis brevibusque sententiis*).[94] This hermeneutical study

[92] 'What Does "Literal Meaning" Mean?', 500.
[93] Harl, intro. to *Philoc.* 1–20 (*SC* 302. 110–18).
[94] *Cant.* prol. 3.11 (*SC* 375. 136).

involves a training of the soul's capacity for love as well. By 'stretching out [the] words' (*extendere verba*; cf. Prov. 1: 24) of a biblical text 'in his heart' (*in eius corde*), the reader acquires 'largeness of heart' (*latitudinem cordis*): 'For the heart of a man is enlarged, when he is able, by taking statements from the Divine Books, to expand by fuller teachings the things that are said briefly and in enigmatic ways.'[95] The hermeneutical training of Proverbs, then, prepares the reader for a right approach to the total figuration of the Song. First, it teaches him how to decipher the profoundly enigmatic and dense expressions of the Song. Second, and more significantly, it also widens the capacity of his heart—what Origen calls the 'wedding-chamber' (*thalamum*) of the Bridegroom and the 'chamber' (*cubiculum*) of the Bride—so that, with time, it may be spacious enough to accommodate not only the Song's natural but also its nuptial figuration: the *amorum figurae* or, as Origen writes in the same section, 'the figure of the Bride and Bridegroom' (*species sponsae ac sponsi*), which fully initiates the soul in the 'love of things divine and heavenly' (*amor caelestium divinorumque*).[96]

Origen similarly relates the pedagogy of Ecclesiastes to the correct interpretation of figuration in the Song. As we have noted, Origen understands Ecclesiastes to discipline the reader in two skills: (1) discernment between the transitory and eternal (i.e. 'flesh' and 'spirit'), and (2) discrimination between the varieties of natural beings. The relationship of this first skill to the Song's figuration should be obvious. Namely, it assists the reader to relinquish sensible-corporeal habits of mind so that, coming to the natural and nuptial figures of the Song, he might read them as re-presentations of the eternal.

But the reader who has learned the second skill will, on Origen's reading, also find it challenged and honed to the point of mastery in the Song. For his study of 'natural science' discloses the character and

[95] 'Dilatatur namque illius cor qui potest ea quae breviter in mysteriis dicta sunt, latiore doctrina sumptis ex voluminibus divinis assertionibus explanare', *Cant.* prol. 3.13 (*SC* 375. 136). Origen's notion that scriptural texts 'expand' the heart's (i.e. the mind's) capacity is crucial to his soteriological hermeneutic, inasmuch as it accounts for how the soul can ever receive sufficient virtue and wisdom to move it beyond any given stage of progress. See also *Ez. Hom. in* 9.1 (*GCS* 33. 405–8).

[96] *Cant.* prol. 3.7 (*SC* 375. 132).

properties of created beings, through whose qualities—once shorn of their corruptibility and 'vanity'—he may then come to contemplate the spiritual exemplars represented in the Song's extensive natural figuration. So crucial is this aspect of the 'natural science' to understanding the literary microcosm contained in the Song that Origen devotes much of one chapter of the *Commentary* (cf. Book 3.13) to its analysis: 'Thus it is to be possible for us to mount up from things below to things above, and to perceive and understand from the things we see on earth to the things that belong to heaven. On the pattern of these the Creator gave to His creatures on earth a certain likeness to these, so that thus their great diversity might be more easily deduced and understood.'[97] We have already examined Origen's application of this principle to the Song in Chapter 1.

The Song of Songs as 'stumbling-block' and 'silver inlay' in the pedagogical structure of the canon

In short, the Song in its entirety is, as it were, a 'silver inlay' of clear understanding, a *skandalon*, set in the midst of other biblical books, which are as 'likenesses of gold'. To insist on a 'corporeal' reading of the text is to kick against the rationality evident in the well-ordered form of the canon. This reasoning applies especially to certain verses which, if taken in isolation from the Song's pedagogical aims, one might plausibly read in a sensible, corporeal way. This interpretative danger is particularly acute in passages that portray the love-acts of the heavenly pair. Origen finds an example of such a verse in Song 2: 6 ('O that his left were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!') and urges his readers to make a good reading:

> The picture (*descriptio*) before us in this drama of love is that of the Bride hastening to consummate her union with the Bridegroom (*sponsae festinantis ad conubium sponsi*), hence, in somewhat plainer language, she runs (*currit*). But turn with all speed to the lifegiving Spirit (*converte te velocius ad Spiritum vivificantem*), and eschewing physical terms (*refugiens appellationes corporeas*), consider carefully what is the left hand of the Word of God, what the right; also what the Bride's head is—the head, that is to say, of the

[97] *Cant.* 3.13.9 (*SC* 376. 628).

perfect soul or of the Church; and do not suffer any interpretation that has to do with the flesh and the passions to carry you away (*et non te rapiat carnalis et passibilis sensus*).[98]

One cannot but admit that whatever corporeal-sensible meaning this passage might actually bear—if such a thing can even be determined—has been traded to purchase these pearls of doctrine. Accordingly, Origen works hard to purge any naturalism from 'the picture before us'. Physical terms are renounced in favour of the spirit, and Origen's caution against the dangers of a carnal interpretation stands alongside the strongest counsel to flee a sexual reading. Thus it is apparent how this passage might reinforce the assumption that Origen spiritualizes the Song primarily as a way of 'dodging the literal meaning', to use N. Bishop's candid expression.[99]

As with his account of the causes of the Bride's blackness, much of Origen's doctrine of fall and redemption is implied in this brief passage: the perils of the undisciplined imagination ('the picture'; *descriptio*), spiritual fall as a 'carrying away' (*rapio*) by the passional distortion of truth, the requirement of *metanoia* ('turn with all speed to the life-giving Spirit'; *converte te velocius ad Spiritum vivificantem*), the Word's salvific love-acts (i.e. his left and right hands), and the redemptive union of Christ and his Bride (i.e. the Word as head of the body). Yet what Origen wants the reader to see above all is that the hermeneutic movement from letter to spirit in the Scripture is an enaction of the nuptial mysteries. The rhetorical form of Origen's exhortation here draws down the spiritual action of the verse from an entirely speculative order—where the love-life of the Bridegroom and Bride is considered *in abstracto*—into the experience of the reader. He shows the form of the Bride's narrative movement into the deeper embraces of her lover to be the same as the form of the Christian's hermeneutical movement into the spiritual meaning of the Song.

Careful reading bears this out. We see that, in the first place, Origen characterizes the Bride's action in the narrative order in three ways:

[98] *Cant.* 3.9.1 (*SC* 376. 582).

[99] 'Denial of the Flesh in Origen', 72. Nor are we surprised to find that Phipps cites this text as yet another example of Origen's attempts to denature the sexuality of the Song; 'The Plight of the Song of Songs', 88.

(1) it is motivated by the love (*amor*) that pervades the whole drama; (2) it is one of 'hastening' (*festino*); and (3) her goal is that of 'union with the Bridegroom' (*conubium sponsi*). Likewise, Origen also defines the reader's task in discerning the spiritual meaning of this verse as threefold: (1) he must be intellectually motivated by spiritual love, so that his 'interpretation' (*sensus*) will not be distorted by carnal passion; (2) he must 'turn with all speed' (*convertere se velocius*) from any and all 'physical terms' (*appellationes corporeae*); (3) his aim must be unity with the 'life-giving Spirit' (*Spiritus vivificans*). In both cases, movement of a spiritual/noetic kind is propelled towards its divine aim by the power of heavenly love.

Thus, Origen urges the Christian to lay hold of his identification with the Bride in and through the very act of reading the Song. By turning from a sensible, corporeal understanding of the text, the reader prepares to set out on the Bride's path to consummation. This 'turning' constitutes an intellectual and moral conversion from the will to confect the kind of alluring fantasies that attach themselves, as mental pictures, to the verse. Thus, it is clear why Origen can so frequently describe the process of allegorical reading in the language of *metanoia.* On Origen's account, the true hermeneutical gesture is not merely interpretative; it is ascetical, redemptive, and, at its point of origin in the soul, erotic. Refining the capacity to perceive the divine sense of Scripture—and particularly the Song—is not simply one mode of *metanoia* among many; it is, for Origen, the highest form and fruition of *metanoia* as such.

The 'turning' to which Origen refers, therefore, denotes what is the first—the initial and principial—interpretative act; and with every new deepening of insight, the soul must confirm its resolve to turn from the exterior to the interior, from the lower to the higher, from the flesh to the spirit. The more intense and desirous the spiritual intelligence of the reader, the more it shares in the Bride's 'haste'. Finally, if the reasoning implicit in this passage holds true, the 'consummation', or union with the Bridegroom, transpires in the reader's attainment of the Song's spiritual sense. Thus, paradoxically, it is the lively discovery of the insight imparted by this verse—namely, that the urgent pursuit of the Word, the innermost reality of Scripture, invites his noetic embrace—that itself secures that same embrace for the reader, via the text.

Hence, as Origen indicates later in the *Commentary*, the right study of the divine curriculum leads the reader 'from life to life' (*ex vita ad vitam*)[100] in pursuit of the Bridegroom's spiritual fragrance, the Song representing that 'life' pre-eminently realized in 'the good odour of Christ' (*Christi bonus odor*; 2 Cor. 2: 15–16); but the one who attempts to tear the Song away from this movement towards 'life' will find that the text now ministers only 'death unto death' (*de morte in mortem*). Origen describes this inversion specifically in relation to the Song:

For, if the sensual man, as he is called, the man who cannot perceive and understand the things of the Spirit of God, were to hear these matters so interpreted, he would doubtless mock and pronounce them foolish and empty, telling us we are discussing dreams, rather than the causes of things and the divine teachings. For such men, therefore, the effect of this odour of the Song of Songs is from death unto death—from the death of unbelief, that is to say, unto the death of judgment and condemnation.[101]

The 'odour of the Song of Songs' (*odor hic Cantici Canticorum*) is not only the fragrance of the Bridegroom's ointments as named and extolled in Song 1: 4 but more especially the fragrance of the Song itself. The 'sensual man' (*homo animalis*) is the one who, having failed to undertake the necessary training of morals and intellect, refuses to see the Song's primacy in the order of divine teaching. Instead, he 'mocks' (*irrideo*) the spiritual reading of the Song, declaring it both 'foolish' (*ineptum*) and 'empty' (*inane*).

Of course, for Origen, it is the sensualist's reading that is 'foolish' and 'empty', a felicitous choice of words suggestive of the first two steps of Solomon's pedagogy. Were the sensualist to study Proverbs he would comprehend his own foolishness (cf. Prov. 10: 8 f.); likewise, in Ecclesiastes, he would realize the ultimate *vanitas* and *inanitas* of created things and hence the emptiness of the mind absorbed with them. The whole divine pedagogy, therefore, is designed to lead the soul beyond 'foolish' and 'empty' things—away from 'death to death' unto 'life to life'—so that in the 'bodiless' figuration of the Song he may find wisdom and plenitude, the exemplars of divine realities rather than the mere husks of 'dreams' (*somnia*).

100 *Cant.* 1.4.21 (*SC* 375. 232).
101 *Cant.* 1.4.23–4 (*SC* 375. 234).

Identifying the pedagogical 'aim' (*skopos*) of the Song of Songs

We see, then, that Origen identifies two paths which the reader may tread as he interprets the Song: on the one hand, the path of the sensual person, who strays far from the right pedagogical way and hastens from 'death unto death' and, on the other hand, the path of the spiritual person, who renounces vanity and rises from 'life unto life'. Of the spiritual person, his path and the relation of both this person and this path to the interpretation of the Song, Origen writes:

> But to those who follow the leading of their subtle spiritual sense (*sequentibus vero spiritalem sensum et subtilem*) and perceive that there is greater truth in the things that are not seen, than there is in those that are seen . . . , this kind of interpretation will doubtless commend itself as that which they should follow and embrace (*amplectanda sine dubio huiusmodi intelligentia videbitur et sequenda*); for they recognize that this is the way of understanding truth that leads to God (*agnoscunt enim tale esse intelligendae veritatis iter quo pervenitur ad Deum*).[102]

When the soul 'follows the leading' of its restored and refined spiritual sense, it discovers at the same time the wholly spiritual 'interpretation' (*intelligentia*) of the Song; that is to say, a 'way of understanding truth' (*intelligendae veritatis iter*) that it should likewise 'follow' (*sequor*) and 'embrace' (*amplector*). What Origen says here specifically of the correct, 'bodiless' reading of the Song applies indeed to the whole of Scripture. For, as we have seen, the Scriptures as a whole embody a 'way of understanding truth'—a *hodos* or *iter*—whose purpose is to lead all readers, at each and every stage of the spiritual journey, into the *sôterias dogmata* of the divine Logos and ultimately to the person of God himself.

Precisely how, then, does Origen understand the Song to initiate the reader into the 'way of understanding truth that leads to God'? The answer to this question will help us to complete two tasks relative to forming an account of Origen's own hermeneutical approach to the Song. First, it will enable us to show where he locates the Song in relation to the whole pedagogy of all Scripture. Second, it will give us a means to further refine our understanding of the Song's 'bodiless-

[102] *Cant.* 1.4.24 (*SC* 375. 234).

ness', in light of the deep and uniquely christological structure that, as we shall find, Origen has attributed to its figuration. This will prepare us to seek, in Chapters 4 and 5, those principles that allow Origen to envision Christ the Bridegroom alone as the deepest *figura*—and immanent Nuptial Reality—in the structure of the Song.

As we noted in Chapter 1, Origen's hermeneutical section in *On First Principles* lays great stress upon the necessity of determining the inspired pedagogical 'aim' or 'aims' (*skopos* or *skopoi*) that any given scriptural text—or even the whole canon—brings to view. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that in the Prologue to the *Commentary on the Song*, Origen provides a precise definition of the Song's *skopos*: 'Before we come to consider the things that are written in this book, therefore, it seems to me necessary to say a few things first about love itself (*de amore prius ipso*), which is the main theme (*causa praecipua*) of this Scripture . . .'[103] No effort to get behind Rufinus' Latin to Origen's Greek can claim absolute certainty. Nevertheless, we can be fairly sure that 'main theme' (*causa praecipua*) identifies the *skopos* of the Song, an equivalence (*causa praecipua* = *skopos*) specifically confirmed by B. Neuschäfer.[104]

Furthermore, 'theme', used by both Lawson and Crouzel here, is too inert a word to capture the volitional sense that *causa* usually implies (e.g. reason, motive, inducement, cause). Indeed, later in the *Commentary*, *causa* identifies the 'philanthropic' motives that impelled Christ to save humanity (*redemptionis ac passionis causas*).[105] Hence *causa praecipua* seems almost to be a palimpsest of ὁ προηγουμένος σκοπός[106] and might find a better translation in

[103] *Cant.* prol. 1.8 (SC 375. 86).

[104] *Origenes als Philologe*, 79. Rufinus' translation of *On First Principles* does not render σκοπός with *causa*. This being said, it is equally true that Rufinus does not translate σκοπός there with complete consistency either. Although he does translate σκοπός as *prospectus* three times—(1) *Princ.* 4.2.8 (*SC* 268. 332) δεύτερος σκοπός > *secundo loco . . . prospectus*; (2) *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336) τοῦ προηγουμένου σκοποῦ > *principaliter prospectus*; (3) *Princ.* 4.3.4 (*SC* 268. 356) σκοπός > *prospectus*]—he neglects to give σκοπός a verbatim rendering the first and most important time that Origen uses it (*Princ.* 4.2.7 (*SC* 268. 326) ὁ σκοπὸς > untranslated). This small inconsistency suggests that Rufinus did not perceive σκοπός to be a technical term of Origen's hermeneutic, as indeed it is; we would not, therefore, expect Rufinus to translate σκοπός identically in all his versions of Origen's writings.

[105] *Cant.* 1.4.5 (*SC* 375. 222).

[106] *Princ.* 4.2.9 (*SC* 268. 336).

'primary aim', 'principal motive' or even 'first cause'. According to Origen, then, the *skopos*—the 'primary aim'—of the Song is the revelation of love (*de amore . . . qui est scripturae causa praecipua*) or, since *skopos* designates the Scripture's pedagogical task, the efficacious instruction in the arts of divine love.[107]

Origen keeps the erotic pedagogy of the Song in focus throughout the *Commentary* and *Homilies*. The pedagogy itself is multifaceted, educating the reader by means of all the soul's major powers and faculties, of which the reader must learn when he comes to Song 1: 8 ('Unless you know yourself, O fair one among women . . .),[108] a text that Origen reads as the true source of the Delphic counsel *γνῶθι σεαυτόν*. He writes:

> In addressing these words to the Bride—that is, to the souls of believers, He makes the height of spiritual health and blessedness to consist in the knowledge and understanding of oneself (*in scientia sui et agnitione*) . . . It seems to me, then, that the soul ought to acquire self-knowledge of a twofold kind (*duplici modo agnitionem sui*): she should know both what she is in herself and how she is actuated (*quidve sit ipsa et qualiter moveatur*); that is to say, she ought to know what she is like essentially, and what she is like according to her dispositions (*id est quid in substantia et quid in affectibus habeat*).[109]

The reader (as soul), then, must first learn 'what she is in herself' (*quidve sit ipsa*)—i.e. a knowing or noetic being (*logikos* and *nous*)—; and second, since she is a creature subject to change for better or for worse, she must discover 'how she is actuated' (*qualiter moveatur*)—(1) by susceptibility to external influence, and (2) by the habituated activity of her own will.

In short, just as Origen tells us in *On First Principles*, the soul is essentially a creature of reason. Yet through its capacity for feeling (*sensibilis*) or imagination (*φανταστική*), the soul is open to the sway of its environment, responding to its allure through various kinds of movement (*mobilis*) or desire (*ὁρμητική*)—whether towards the

[107] On efficacious instruction in heavenly love (*amor*) and desire (*desiderium*) as the aim of the Song's pedagogy in the *enoptikê*, see *Cant.* prol. 3.7 (*SC* 375. 132); prol. 3.15–16 (*SC* 375. 138); prol. 3.23 (*SC* 375. 142).

[108] NRSV 'If you do not know, O fairest among women . . .'

[109] *Cant.* 2.5.6–7 (*SC* 375. 356–8).

spirit or towards the flesh, towards God or towards the world.[110] Ultimately, Origen thinks that these faculties can only be distinguished, never separated. And indeed the soul bears clearest witness to its own unity when intellect and will are drawn into a unified activity through a single-minded love. For Origen, no less than for Augustine, love is as much an appetite of the mind as of the will.[111]

To Origen's mind, then, the pedagogy of the Song, if it is to model the proper aim of the whole divine pedagogy itself, must act upon all these powers with a paradigmatic economy of expression. The Song must educate, reasonably teaching the doctrines of love. But it must also act directly upon the soul's total emotive faculty, so that it might both feel and move out of itself—that is, fully *e-mote*—towards the truly desirable things portrayed figuratively in the Song. In other words, the Song must both inform the reader about divine love and, simultaneously, in-form the reader with its character.

In his 'bodiless' reading of the Song of Songs, therefore, Origen never loses sight of the pedagogical function of the text as a whole. Indeed, he ascribes to the text of the Song itself the capacity to inculcate salvific *erôs*, which is the summit of the spiritual life. Moreover, he ultimately traces this same pedagogy in *erôs* to the person of the Bridegroom-Logos, who is the unique teacher, begetter, and object of love. The fact that the unity and uniqueness of the Song (as a whole book) consummately embodies the Scripture's unique enoptic pedagogy in *erôs* raises a question that will determine the course of the remaining discussion: *does Origen think the Song of Songs itself to be the biblical mode of the Bridegroom-Logos' presence as singer and pedagogue in nuptial erôs?*

The next chapter will prepare us to arrive at a positive answer to this question and so to deepen our appreciation of the Song as the text whose 'bodilessness' is convergent—and indeed identical—with the 'bodilessness' of the eternal Logos. We shall show that Origen

[110] For the created soul as spiritually rational being, see *Princ.* 1.1.6–7 (*SC* 252. 98–106); for feeling, imagination, movement, and desire, see esp. *Princ.* 2.8.1–2 (*SC* 252. 336–42).

[111] For a discussion of the unity of the human person and the complementary relation of mental, volitional, and emotional acts, see C. V. Harris, *Origen of Alexandria's Interpretation of the Teacher's Function in the Early Christian Hierarchy and Community* (New York, 1966), 42–72.

develops his account of the Song's efficacious love-teaching towards the most ultimate finality conceivable, in a way that demands a radically christological formulation of pedagogy, figuration, and 'bodilessness' at the metaphysical limits of the text *qua* text. To see not only that Origen understands this to be true of the Song but also that this view coheres with his hermeneutic as a whole, we must first establish the role that prophetic authorship and the context of revelation play in his conception of any biblical text's—whether 'bodily' or 'bodiless'—composition and its interpretation. We shall hereafter shift our focus to texts considered as unities, particularly whole books of the Bible. In light of this discussion, we shall be prepared finally to consider how the Song is in Origen's judgement both the great exception to and the great exemplar of Scripture as a whole, precisely because it shares an identity with the manifest presence of the One who transcends Scripture as its source even while abiding in it as its 'spirit'.

4

Origen on the Hermeneutical Unity of the Song of Songs

CONTEXT, AUTHORSHIP AND THE 'BODY' OF SCRIPTURE

The 'bodily' context of 'bodiless' texts

Origen understands asomatic texts (apart from the Song) to be interconnected with, and thus highly ramified by, the 'bodiliness' of the larger texts to which they belong. His exposition of the Hexaemeron, taken from his *Homily 1 on Genesis*, will shed light on this and help us to see its importance.[1] In this homily, Origen reads the six days of creation (Genesis 12: 3) as an ontological map rather than as a strictly historical record. For Origen, this map reveals a sixfold structure of principles hidden within natural being and the rational creature.[2] These six principles are together seen in relation to the supertemporal 'beginning' (ἀρχή) of the divine Logos (John 1: 1): 'Scripture is not speaking here of any temporal beginning (*non ergo hic temporale aliquod principium dicit*), but it says that the heaven and the earth and all things which were made were made 'in the

[1] *Hom. in Gen.* 1 (*SC* 7bis. 24–74), tr. R. Heine, *FOC* 29, 47–71.

[2] For example, time—as a principle of measurement—comes into being only on the second, third, and fourth days, *Hom. in Gen.* 1.1. (*SC* 7bis. 26). On the third day (creation of green vegetation) is created the principle of fruitfulness towards God, *Hom. in Gen.* 1.4 (ibid. 34–8). On the fourth day, the creation of 'sun and moon' or 'two great lights' are the establishment of Christ and the Church, *Hom. in Gen.* 1.7 (ibid. 40–4). Or again, the creation of humanity as 'male and female' (day six) makes of the rational creature a being of 'spirit' (=male) and 'soul' (= female), united in a fecund nuptial relation, *Hom. in Gen.* 1.15 (ibid. 66–8). See also *Cels.* 6.60–1 (*SC* 147. 326–32).

beginning', that is, in the Saviour (*in Salvatore*).'[3] Origen follows Philo in shifting the events of Gen. 1: 1 to the eternal realm, and in other works, like Philo, equates the eternal *archê* with the seventh 'day', which names the 'rest' of God's eternal being.[4] Some kind of 'bodiless' interpretation is the only possible sense of this text, for 'what man of intelligence', Origen asks in *On First Principles*, 'will believe that the first and second and third day, and the evening and the morning existed without the sun and moon and stars? And that the first day, if we may so call it, was even without a heaven?'[5]

But this is only half of the picture. For, even while the whole creation story itself possesses no 'body' in Origen's hermeneutical sense, the divine wisdom has nevertheless seen fit to weave these incorporeal meanings seamlessly into the longer narrative of the entire book of Genesis. Far from simply approaching this longer narrative of Genesis as a repository of spiritual fictions, Origen combs it for truth about historical persons and events, even when scepticism might have been easier for him intellectually or pure 'bodiless' allegory hermeneutically. For example, in *Homily 2 on Genesis*, he argues, against the ironic remark of the Marcionite Apelles, not only that the Ark of Noah existed but also that it was big enough to hold all the animals mentioned in Genesis.[6] Or again, Lot's wife was actually transformed into a pillar of salt.[7] Many more such literalisms in Origen's reading of Genesis are readily identifiable.[8] The 'bodiless' creation story, therefore, is linked by the prin-

[3] *Hom. in Gen.* 1.1 (*SC* 7bis. 24), tr. R. Heine, *FOC* 29, 47. Origen's definitive treatment of Christ as *Archê* appears in his exegesis of John 1: 1 (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος) in *Jo.* 1.90–118 (*SC* 120bis.102–20).

[4] See e.g. *Cels.* 6.61 (*SC* 147. 330–2).

[5] *Princ.* 4.3.1 (*SC* 268. 342). As with the words and terms of the Song, Origen applies the principle of homonymy to interpret the meaning of sun, moon, stars, day, heaven, and every other name of beings or actions in the Genesis story. Thus, an analogical relationship that Origen perceives to exist between these created beings and their spiritual prototypes allows him to transfer these terms in Genesis entirely to spiritual realities.

[6] *Hom. in Gen.* 2.2 (*SC* 7bis. 84–8).

[7] *Hom. in Gen.* 5.2 (*SC* 7bis. 166–8).

[8] Origen's faith in the Scripture's miracle stories shows a confidence in the biblical history that one would be astonished to find in many scholars who take Origen to task over the question of his fidelity to the significance of history. H. de Lubac's painstaking inventory of biblical events whose historicity Origen defends should suffice to answer those critics who would claim that he dispenses with the truth of

ciple of 'coherence' (*heirmos*) to a much more extensive 'sequence' (*akolouthia*) of 'bodily' narratives in the book of Genesis.

On Origen's view, furthermore, the transition between the opening spiritual narrative of Genesis and its later 'corporeal' narrative is an uninterrupted movement from the universal to the particular, from the spiritual to the corporeal, marked by the moment when Adam loses his character as the *persona* of the original rational-corporeal creation and descends into the bodily multiplicities of the fallen world.[9] The universal and metaphysical teaching couched in the figures of Genesis 3 is what Origen identifies as 'the secret and mysterious meaning, superior to the Platonic doctrine of the descent of the soul which loses its wings and is carried hither "until it finds some firm resting-place" '.[10] Thus Adam's ontological fall, marked by the text's corresponding descent into 'bodiliness' (or even 'fleshliness'), requires of the reader a profound epistemological shift. For when the first parents assume their 'coats of skin' (Gen. 3: 21)—their fleshly bodies—the reader's imagination must simultaneously assume its own fleshly garment, just as the text now takes on a fleshly character.[11]

In effect, therefore, Origen grounds the spiritual sense of the greater part of Genesis in a more obvious corporeal sense. The discursive continuity linking the 'bodilessness' of the creation story to what we might describe as the 'embodied' stories of Genesis, such as that of Noah, is of the greatest significance to Origen's perception and exegesis of the text. For, Origen's hermeneutic treats the discursive

history altogether. Origen does, in fact, frequently go out of his way to substantiate the historicity of scriptural stories, particularly miracle stories. We could look to Origen's well-known proof that Egypt actually suffered the Ten Plagues. Balaam's ass spoke as though it were rational. The sun, the cosmic icon of Christ the True Sun, actually suspended its course at Joshua's signal. Origen's careful defence of these biblical episodes, wherein are shown the many ways in which God orders events to the end of human redemption, requires us to admit that diachronic history plays a crucial role in his reading of Scripture. See *Histoire et Esprit*, 92–104.

[9] *Hom. in Jer.* 2.1 (*GCS* 6. 16–17).

[10] *Cels.* 4.40 (*SC* 136. 290). See also Plato, *Phaedrus* 246B, C.

[11] Origen does not, we emphasize, teach that at the fall Adam assumed substantial corporeality for the first time but rather that his original body was afflicted with 'fleshly' qualities of gross terrestriality; see H. Crouzel, 'La thème platonicien du "véhicule de l'âme" chez Origène', *Didaskalia* 7 (1977), 232–3 and C. P. Bammel, in R. Williams (ed.), 'Adam in Origen', in *The Making of Orthodoxy,* (Cambridge, 1989), 62–93.

structure of scriptural texts as defining the path of spiritual or noetic advancement to be travelled by the reader. The progressive path of the entire book of Genesis, therefore, is orientated towards an accommodation to the sensible imagination of the reader, since its discursive thread runs directionally from the incorporeal towards the corporeal. In other words, the 'bodilessness' of the creation narrative is not absolute. It is qualified by its intrinsic connection—imbedded in the structure of the text itself—to other texts possessing hermeneutical *sôma*.

The ultimate divine aim in connecting asomatic with somatic texts is not, of course, to limit the reader to the sensible meanings. Rather, the seamless continuity between 'body' and the 'bodiless' in any such biblical text is both an accommodation to the reader's limited capacity for spiritual understanding and, at the same time, an invitation for the reader to elevate his view of the whole text to a spiritual level. In *On First Principles*, Origen explains:

> When, therefore, as will be clear to those who read, the passage as a connected whole is literally impossible, whereas the outstanding part of it is not impossible but even true, the reader must endeavour to grasp the entire meaning, connecting by an intellectual process the account of what is literally impossible with the parts that are not impossible but are historically true, these being interpreted allegorically in common with the parts which, so far as the letter goes, did not happen at all.[12]

To give the best reading to such a composite, bodiless-bodily text requires a noetic exertion, an 'endeavour to grasp' (*φιλοτιμητέον καταλαμβάνειν*) the spiritual sense of the whole text (*ὅλον τὸν νοῦν*) through an 'intellectual process' (*νοητῶς*) that forges appropriate links between somatic and asomatic, impossible and possible conceptions. Reading Genesis *well* engages the reader in a struggle against the easy narrative flow towards temporalities. Moving upstream, as it were, from narrative history to narrative superhistory, one attains not only to the literary beginning of text and canon but, intelligibly, to the Beginning—the *Archê*—itself.

[12] *Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν, ὡς σαφὲς ἔσται τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν, ἀδύνατος μὲν ὁ ὡς πρὸς τὸ ῥητὸν εἱρμός, οὐκ ἀδύνατοςδὲ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀληθὴς ὁ προηγ ούμενος, ὅλον τὸν νοῦν φιλοτιμητέονκαταλαμβάνειν, συνείροντα τὸν περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴνλέξινἀδυνάτων λόγον νοητῶς τοῖς οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἀδυνάτοις ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀληθέσι κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν, συναλληγορουμένοις τοῖς ὅσονἐπὶ τῇ λέξει μὴ γεγενημένοις*, *Princ.* 4.3.5 (*SC* 268. 362).

The 'bodily' character of whole biblical books

Origen's hermeneutic requires a second qualification of the 'bodilessness' of the creation narrative and similar scriptural texts. This qualification applies to the greater texts—that is, to the biblical books—to which such discrete 'bodiless' texts and passages belong or, more exactly, in whose greater unity they subsist. That is to say, even if some given text or passage is 'bodiless', it will always belong to a book that Origen will judge to have a somatic and sensible character, inasmuch as it is the product of an historically conditioned event of revelation.

Yet Origen makes the Song the unique, and hence all-important, exception to this rule. Not only does he give each individual *logos* of the Song an asomatic reading (as we observed in Chapter 1) but he also interprets the Song in a manner that makes *the book itself, taken as a whole* to be 'bodiless'. To appreciate the hermeneutical significance of this position fully as well as how Origen arrives at it, we must first consider two issues: (1) that Origen includes the revelatory context and prophetic authorship of any biblical book in his exegesis of the book as a whole; and (2) that Origen thinks context and authorship to be ontological constituents of the text itself and thus available to the reader, through anagogical ascent, as a field for contemporary encounter with the Logos.

With any scriptural text, Origen's exegesis appropriates its primary originating context—the historical setting of the text's disclosure to the prophet—as a hermeneutical datum crucial to the identification of its *skopos* and hence of its meaning as a whole. This fact has been suggested, although incompletely developed, in the research of K. Torjesen, who writes of the stress laid by Origen upon what she calls the 'historical limit of the spiritual sense'.[13] Torjesen correctly argues that Origen's doctrine of inspiration regards the whole of Scripture as, in the very plainest sense, the real words of the divine Word. Nevertheless, she points out, Origen also understands all scriptural texts to be the fruit of prophetic cooperation with the specific salvific aims of the Logos. Consequently, to hear the words

[13] See *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 112–13 for Torjesen's full discussion.

of any book of the Bible is to hear two voices participatively intermingled: (1) the voice of the Word, and (2) the voice of the prophet.

Torjesen supports her understanding of this 'historical limit' with an important text from the *Commentary on John*, in which Origen sets about to explain how gospel records of the four evangelists can vary so widely. His account hinges upon the principle of divine 'accommodation':

But to grasp some notion of the evangelists' intention concerning such matters, we must also say the following. Assume that God, his words to the saints (*τοὺς τούτου̃ πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους λόγους*), and his presence (*τήν τε παρουσίαν*), which is present with them when he reveals himself at special times in their progress (*αὐτοῖς ἐξαιρέτοις καιροῖς τῆς προκοπῆς*), are set before certain people who see in the Spirit (*τισὶ προκείμενον βλέπουσι τῷ πνεύματι*). Since they are several and they are in different places (*ἐν διαφόροις τόποις*), and by no means all receive the same benefits, assume that each one individually reports what he sees in the Spirit (*ἑκάστῳ ἰδίᾳ ἀπαγγεῖλαι ἃ βλέπει τῷ πνεύμαπι*) about God, his words, and his manifestations to the saints (*περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ, τῶν τε πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους ἐμφανειῶν*)... To one, then, who thinks that the writing of these men is history (*τῷ ἱστορίαν εἰναι*), which would proceed to present the deeds through an historical image (*διὰ εἰκόνος ἱστορικῆς*), and who supposes that God is in space with its limitation, not being able to produce several appearances of himself (*πλείονας ἑαυτοῦ ἐμποιῆσαι φαντασίας*) at the same time to several people (*πλείοσιν*) in several places (*ἐν πλείοσιν τόποις*), and to say several things at the same time (*πλείονα ἅμα λέγειν*), it will seem impossible that the four men (*τέσσερας*), whom I presented, are telling the truth. For it is impossible, in this view, for God to be in some prescribed time (*ἐν τῷδέ τινι τῷ τεταγμένῳ καιρῷ*), since he is also thought to be in space with its limitation (*κατὰ περιγραφὴν αὐτὸν ... ἐν τόπῳ*)... [14]

Curiously, Torjesen considers only how this passage illuminates Origen's interpretation of individual biblical stories. On her reading, then, the 'historical limit of the spiritual sense' abides exclusively in the narrative details of the inspired texts, in the stories of the saints recorded in the sacred texts.

In fact, Origen is principally concerned here to show how the evangelists could have written such different and sometimes widely

[14] *Jo.* 10.15–17 (*SC* 157. 390–2), tr. R. Heine, 259–61.

divergent accounts of Christ's life (e.g. John *vis à vis* the synoptic gospels). Origen indeed affirms that these differences reflect the many ways in which Christ bestows his 'manifestations to the saints' (*τῶν τε πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους ἐμφανειῶν*)—the characters in the gospel stories—in accord with their progressively growing capacities for spiritual insight. Yet, even more fundamental to Origen than these narrated differences of insight are the different modes and degrees of spiritual vision experienced by the evangelists (or prophets) themselves—in other words, the narrators' differences of insight. The prophets and evangelists are principally those 'certain people who see in the Spirit' (*τισὶ βλέπουσι τῷ πνεύματι*), each of whom 'individually reports what he sees in the Spirit' (*ἑκάστῳ ἰδίᾳ ἀπαγγεῖλαι ἃ βλέπει τῷ πνεύματι*). The announcement is the whole inspired text itself. The prophet's vision—the unique mode of his own encounter with the divine Logos—is infallibly recorded in the revealed book, not only as its 'content' and teaching but as its very form.

According to Origen, the divine Logos and his human prophet, while really united in the single act of producing the revealed text, yet negotiate a relationship conditioned by several factors that shape the spiritual constitution of the text as a whole: (1) the time (*καιρός*) of revelation, (2) the place (*τόπος*) of revelation, (3) the degree of the righteous prophet's (*δίκαιος* as *λογικός*)[15] own conformity to the Logos at the time of revelation, and (4) the needs of the audience(s) of those 'saints' (*ἅγιοι*) for whom God intends it. In Origen's hermeneutic, then, the initial prophetic experience defines the being of the text itself. This is because the original context of a text's disclosure also defines the limit of its use.

Although the text may be layered with multiple uses, the only context which includes the whole text along with its every virtual application is the ultimate sense, the ultimate limit of the prophet's own reception of the text in his particular degree of conformity to the

[15] For *λογικός* see *Jo.* 1.158–61 (*SC* 120bis. 138–40). Concerning the relationship of *δίκαιος* and *λογικός*: Origen applies the term *logikos* ('capable of reasoning') to the created soul insofar as it is naturally (1) 'reasonable', and (2) a participant in the nature of the divine Logos. However, Origen also points to a special mode of grace-given participation in the divine life of the Logos that is reserved to the saints, making them—like the prophets—not only *λογικοί* but *ἐνθέως λογικοί*, *Jo.* 1.268 (*SC* 120bis. 196)—righteous (i.e. *δίκαιος*) with God's righteousness; see *Cels.* 6.64 (*SC* 147. 338).

mind and intentions of the divine Word. Since it is the 'use' of the scriptural text that determines both its genre and its function, the whole being of the scriptural text, perceived as a unity of sense, purpose, and meaning, must be traced back to the original context of revelation. Likewise, the historical, local, and physical conditions of revelation—in short, everything that makes a text possess *sôma*—remain irrevocably a part of the whole text.

The prophet's presence to the scriptural text

Origen does not understand these contextual factors, such as *kairos* and *topos*, to envelop the text independently and absolutely. Like the text itself, these contextual realities are intellectually and spiritually mediated, insofar as the prophet has them in view at the time of revelation, forming the 'limit' of his vision into the divine mysteries. This 'limit' is expressive of the prophet's own degree of conformity to the word, and it coincides entirely, according to God's will, with the degree of spiritual advancement enjoyed by the text's intended audience. In other words, the text is not abstractly or immediately conditioned by historical/corporeal reality but only through the mediation of the prophetic mind.

Even if the text is, for Origen, essentially restricted by its context (which includes speaker, place, and time), it is nonetheless this restriction that causes the text to exist in the first place. The 'limit' that context places on a Scripture's spiritual potency simply defines its function in the salvific programme made available in Scripture. Indeed, Origen understands the whole of Scripture itself to be bounded by a 'limit' that causes it to be a canon:

But it is common knowledge that the apostles and evangelists borrowed and put into the New Testament many things that we read nowhere in the Scripture that we account canonical (*canonicas*), but that are found none the less in the apocryphal writings, and are quite obviously taken from them. Not that the apocryphal writings are to be given a place in this way: we must 'not overpass the everlasting limits which our fathers have set (*non enim transferendi sunt termini aeterni, quos statuerunt patres nostri*; Prov. 22: 28).[16]

[16] *Cant.* prol. 4.34 (*SC* 375. 170).

The 'everlasting limits which our fathers have set' (*termini aeterni, quos statuerunt patres nostri*) certainly denotes the canon's material unity, which also defines the limits of any legitimate exegetical search. Yet it also points to the canon's intellectual unity, by which it subsists in the shared *logos* of 'our fathers' (i.e. apostles and prophets).[17]

Origen appeals to this idea frequently. We find an important instance in a fragment deriving from Book 5 of the *Commentary on John*,[18] where Origen answers the charge that his written exegesis violates the biblical counsel to eschew 'much speaking' (cf. Prov. 10: 19) and the 'making many books', of which 'there is no end' (see Eccl. 12: 12).[19] In his defence, Origen argues that his exegetical project has merely extended, by a participative analogy, the same relation of manifoldness to unity that exists pre-eminently in the Scriptures themselves. The words and books of Scripture, he reasons, are really 'one' (*λόγος εἷς*; *ἓν βιβλίον*) rather than 'many' (*πολυλογία*; *πολλὰ βιβλία*), because the meaning of each word and book is 'part of the whole Word' (*ὧν ἕκαστον θεώρημα μέρος ἐστὶ τοῦ ὅλου λόγου*); they are all intelligibles (*θεωρήματα*) constitutive of the personal Logos who 'was in the beginning with God' (*λόγος ὁ ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν*).[20] The many *logoi* of Scripture—of saints, prophets, and apostles—are truly 'one word' (*λόγος εἷς*) because they share in the unity of the Logos and his mind: 'the saints are not loquacious since they cling to the goal which accords with the one word'

[17] Not all are convinced that Origen's concept of the biblical canon is so definite as I have suggested. In the most detailed study of the question to date, R. P. C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London, 1954), contends that Origen does not hold a recognizable conception of canon and that in practice he acknowledges 'the authenticity of any tradition outside the Jewish canon that appeals to him' (p. 137). Yet, Hanson defines 'canon' so narrowly—as 'the conception of an official *list*' (p. 138)—that Origen's tentative advocacy or use of disputed books (e.g., the *Book of Enoch*, the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, the *Epistle* of Clement) inevitably begins to look arbitrary or esoteric. Hanson's claim that Origen 'never uses [*κανών*] to mean what we mean by the phrase "Canon of Scripture" ' is strictly correct. Nevertheless, Origen does describe the Church's collection of sacred books as a *kanon*—cf. *Hom. in Jos.* 2.1 (*SC* 71. 118): 'in canone non habetur', referring to the apocryphal *Assumption of Moses*—and employs a range of expressions that portray the canon as fixed and finite, even if the Church has not fully staked out its boundaries. See esp. J. M. Caballero-Questa, *Origenes Interprete de la Sagrada Escritura* (Burgos, 1956), 23–9.

[18] *Jo.* 5 (*SC* 120bis. 376–94) = *Philoc.* 5 (*SC* 302. 284–98); tr. Heine, 160–7.

[19] *Jo.* 5.1–2 (*SC* 120bis. 376–8).

[20] *Jo.* 5.5–6 (*SC* 120bis. 384–8), tr. Heine, 163.

(*καὶ οὐ πολυλογοῦσινοἱ ἅγιοι τοῦ σκοποῦ τοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἕνα ἐχόμενοι λόγον*).[21] On this basis, Origen claims that his own exegesis, embraced within the limits defined by this common scriptural *logos*, shares in that *logos* and hence is itself 'one' rather than 'many', sharing in a kind of subsidiary inspiration.

Equally illustrative is Origen's reading of LXX Ps. 39: 7 ('In the head of the book it is written of me'),[22] found in a fragment from his *Commentary on the Psalms.*[23] He explains that the 'head of the book' (*ἡ κεφαλὶς βιβλίου*) does not refer merely to one special scriptural text among others in the 'book' of the canon. Rather, it signifies the 'whole God-inspired Scripture' (*ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν θεόπνευστον γραφήν*), insofar as 'the Word which came to us is summed up there in one single point: "to do your will, O my God" (Ps. 40: 8)' (*τῷ ἀνακεφαλαιοῦσθαι τὸν παρ' ἑαυτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐληλυθότα Λόγον εἰς ἕν, τοῦ ποιῆσαι τὸ θέλημα σοῦ, ὁ θεός μοῦ*). The 'head', then, denotes the Scriptures' hidden intellectual unity, made visible in the manifest unity that makes them one 'book' or, to complete the metaphorical transposition, one 'body': 'Notice that for me the Scriptures are in this way... one complete body of the Word.'[24] Again, Origen has linked the notions of *logos* (or *nous*, as 'limit') and 'body' to describe the integral nature of inspired texts, in which a single spiritual principle organizes many parts into one harmonious whole.

Thus the presence of these conditions or 'limits' to any scriptural text is positive, just as it is for the whole canon. It means no less, K. Torjesen writes, than that:

> ... the Logos in Scripture enlightens the eye of the reader, not in the unitary brilliance of his own light, but rather in the multiplicity and diversity of individual colorations which are all forms of the single light once it has been diffracted through the experience of the saints.[25]

[21] *Jo.* 5.5 (*SC* 120bis. 386), tr. Heine, 163.

[22] '*Τότε εἶπον, ἰδοὺ ἥκω· ἐν κεφαλίδι βιβλίου γέγραπται περὶ ἐμοῦ*'; NRSV Ps. 40: 7: 'Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me."'

[23] See *Comm. in Ps. Frag.* 39.8 (Pitra, *Analecta Sacra*, 3, 36), cited in von Balthasar, *Spirit and Fire,* tr. Daly (Washington, DC, 1984), 99.

[24] *Hom. in Jer.* 39.2 frag. (*GCS* 6.197), tr. Smith, 279.

[25] *Hermeneutical Procedure,* 113.

Therefore, Origen understands all the canonical Scriptures to preserve the same 'now but not yet' tension between 'letter' and 'spirit' (or 'Law' and 'Gospel') typical of the entire economy of salvation. The effect of reading a scriptural text is one of sharing to one degree or another in the original conditions of revelation. In turn, this participation assimilates the reader to the experience of the prophet himself.[26]

Consequently, even though the words of the Logos are truly given in every Scripture, they are not received without intervention but rather through the mediation of another. On the one hand, then, Origen believes that the 'spirit' or 'spiritual Gospel'—the *εὐαγγέλιον νοητὸν καὶ πνευματικόν*, which becomes available through the spiritual advent of the Word[27]—resides as a potency within every Scripture, by virtue of the Logos' real presence to the text. On the other hand, to attain to this presence, the reader must proceed stepwise through and in concert with the prophet's intellectual activity, which is fully immanent in the text. From Origen's point of view, therefore, to read any scriptural text requires a subordination to the experience of the prophet—temporal, local, finite, embodied. *It is, in other words, to perceive the 'spirit' through the prophetic 'body' of the text.*

Origen discerns the prophet's activity in two modalities: first, as the orderly discursive flow of the words or expressions (*logoi*) of the text and, second, as the unique *logos* that is its underlying unity. This prophetic activity is apparent, for example, in the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) under the aspect of what Origen calls the 'voice of the Lawgiver' (*vox legislatoris*).[28] He identifies this Mosaic 'voice' as 'the veil of the letter' (*litterae velamen*), and, significantly, he equates it analogically with the *fleshly* veil of the Incarnate Word.[29] We see at work here the semantic *glissande*—to use Crouzel's and Harl's expression[30]—so frequently encountered in Origen's exegesis.

[26] Torjesen shows how Origen develops this notion of the dynamic hermeneutical interaction of text, prophet, and reader as an exegetical method for finding the contemporary significance of any biblical text; see *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 130–4.

[27] *Jo.* 1.37–46 (*SC* 120bis. 78–82).

[28] *Hom. in Lev.* 1.1 (*SC* 286. 68).

[29] *Hom. in Lev.* 1.1 (*SC* 286. 66).

[30] Crouzel, '*Connaissance Mystique*', 58; Harl, *Origène: Philocalie*, *SC* 302. 312.

Origen himself calls this continual slipping of words one into another 'transposition' or 'alternation' (μετάληψις).[31] Through *metalêpsis* 'voice', 'letter', and 'flesh' acquire a certain synonymity, so that they may be used interchangeably in reference to the same subject. Thus, when applied to scriptural texts, 'voice', 'letter', and 'flesh' all describe the same reality—the mediatory aspect of the text that conveys the Word's presence to the reader.

The analogical equivalence of 'letter' and 'flesh' points to the theological rationale that supports Origen's attribution of hermeneutical *sarx* or *sôma* to the Scriptures. In this context, the 'body' of a scriptural text is the 'letter', in all of its innate complexity. Since the *velamen litterae* is identical to the *vox legislatoris* (i.e. Mosaic or prophetic voice), we must conclude that in the final analysis Origen likewise understands the prophet's voice, insofar as it is present in and through the scriptural text, to define the outermost boundary of its hermeneutical 'body'. All other literary and narrative dimensions of the text are but virtualities of this embodied, historical voice.

Thus, Origen understands 'body' and prophetic 'voice' ultimately to reduce to the same reality in Scripture. Conversely, then, wherever the reader discerns the prophet's voice present to a Scriptural text, he likewise discerns 'body' in it. Origen's line of reasoning here confirms the position that we are attempting to defend in these paragraphs: *that he understands scriptural texts which are 'bodiless' from one point of view, such as the creation narrative, nevertheless to possess a hermeneutical 'body' by virtue of their assimilation to the prophet's voice.* Consequently, Origen recognizes for the purposes of spiritual exegesis that the presence of the divine Logos in the Scriptural text must always be discerned in, through, and along with the mind and voice of the prophet or apostle. As the divinity of the Word must be discerned in his incarnate flesh, as the spirit must be discerned in the letter, so must the immanent speech of the Logos be discerned in the 'voice' of the Logos' mediator.

A valuable illustration of the centrality of the prophet and of prophetic context to the understanding of a biblical book as a whole appears in Origen's *Homily 1 on Jeremiah*.[32] The opening verses

[31] See texts and discussion in Harl, ibid. 133–5.

[32] *Hom. in Jer.* 1 (*SC* 232. 196–237).

of Jeremiah (1: 1–10) narrate the initial dialogue between Jeremiah and 'the Word of the Lord', who comes to Jeremiah bearing the command to write his prophecy. Origen explicates this opening conversation as a sort of prologue to the prophetic book proper. This division of the text allows him to situate the event of Jeremiah's revelation in its historical context, to relate this context to the character of the book taken as a whole, and then, on a solid historical foundation, to allegorize the initial prophetic event *qua* event. At this level the 'literal sense' refers less, as Torjesen thinks, 'to the historical pedagogy of the Logos with the people of Israel'[33] than to the historical pedagogy of the Logos with Jeremiah himself.

In his exegesis of this 'prologue' to Jeremiah, then, Origen first alerts his readers to the fact that he now has the whole book, and not merely some isolated part of it, in view; he identifies its genre—a 'sentence' (κόλασις) or 'judgement' (καταδίκη)[34]—and then proceeds to explain its special *skopos* as an instrument of divine mercy: 'For when [God] sentences, he says so, and the speaking is a way to turn the person being condemned away from the sentencing.'[35] Next, Origen considers all of the contextual factors (i.e. *logikos, kairos, topos*) that qualify the text as a whole. He identifies the prophet (*logikos* = Jeremiah) who is the messenger of this divine 'sentence' and then the *kairos* (here, *chronos*) of the prophetic encounter: 'You will find the same in what concerns Jeremiah (ἐπὶ κατὰ τὸν Ἱερεμίαν). The time of prophecy (ὁ χρόνος τῆς προφητείας) is recorded—when (πότε) he began, and until when (μέχρι πότε) he prophesied.'[36] He then names the *topos* of the book's revelation: 'God sentenced Jerusalem (τὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ) for her sins, and those condemned were to be delivered into captivity (εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν)'.[37] Finally, having established the historical background of the revelatory event and the book as a whole, Origen proceeds to interpret, as he says, 'anagogically': 'Let us refer the whole context then to Jeremiah,

[33] 'The Logos Incarnate', 32.

[34] *Hom. in Jer.* 1.1 (*SC* 232, 196).

[35] Ibid., tr. J.C. Smith, 3. By emphasizing the reformatory character of *kolasis* and *katadikê*, Origen shows that Jeremiah's aim here is in harmony with the general aim of all prophets to improve (ἐπανορθοῦν) their listeners by means of threats as well as promises. See also *Cels.* 4.10 (*SC* 136. 206–8).

[36] *Hom. in Jer.* 1.2 (*SC* 232. 198).

[37] *Hom. in Jer.* 1.3 (*SC* 232. 198).

and explain what seems to be greater than Jeremiah.'[38] The mind of the prophet itself, conditioned by the limits of the revelatory context, becomes the fundamental datum of allegory.

By placing such tremendous hermeneutical weight upon the real conditions of scriptural revelation, Origen firmly presses every biblical text, *qua* text, into the physical dimensions of historical being. Even where the meaning of some given passage of Scripture is asomatic, it reveals a sensible and bodily aspect when read in the unity of the whole inspired text. This is even more acutely true in the case of Old Testament texts, where apart from the interpretative wisdom imparted by the Gospel, the voice of the Logos is wholly veiled.[39] In the case of the book of Leviticus, for example, exegetes who choose to 'follow the simple understanding . . . without using in their terms of ridicule the stratagems of language or the cloud of allegory'[40] will hear only the 'voice of the Lawgiver' compelling sacrifice and cultic obedience. And, in the case of the first verses of Jeremiah, Origen writes: 'if the reader neither pays heed to the passage nor examines the intent of what was read, he will say it is a history (*ἐρεῖ ὅτι ἱστορία ἐστίν*) and it records what Jeremiah began to prophesy and how long before he stopped prophesying. What then does this history mean for me? (*τὶ οὖν πρὸς ἐμὲ αὐτὴ ἡ ἱστορία;*)'.[41] The reader must transcend the historical limits of the prophetic text to discover its contemporary value.[42]

The task of the spiritually minded Christian reader is to discern the voice of Christ living and teaching in and through the voice of the prophet—a penetration to the divine 'spirit' in the 'body' of the text. When applied to the entire biblical text, this movement mandates a transfigured perception of its *topos* and *kairos*. Nevertheless, the being of the text itself remains permanently wedded to the 'voice of the prophet'. The 'body' of the text and all of its various elements are fixed at their own level.

[38] *Hom. in Jer.* 1.6 (*SC* 232. 206).

[39] *Jo.* 1.32–36 (*SC* 120bis. 74–6).

[40] *Hom. in Lev.* 1.1 (*SC* 286. 68), tr. Barkley, 29–30.

[41] *Hom. in Jer.* 1.2 (*SC* 232. 198), emphasis mine.

[42] 'Origen's interpretation [of Jeremiah] makes the hearer a recipient of the same prophetic word, thereby placing him also under the tutelage of the Logos', Torjesen, 'The Logos Incarnate', 32.

When Origen expounds the 'bodiless' creation story, it is with all of these considerations in mind. In his exegesis, the creation narrative remains a textual reality imparted by prophetic mediation. He grounds the whole book of Genesis in the prophetic activity of Moses, whom along with the patriarchs and prophets he identifies as a 'star among us, who shines and illumines us by his acts' (*Moyses stella est in nobis, quae lucet et illuminat nos actibus suis*)—that is, as one soul testifying along with many others.[43] Since Genesis 1: 1–2.3 is only a portion of the whole book, to read the 'bodiless' creation narrative is nevertheless also to hear Moses, the historical and physical person, speaking in his prophetic role. Furthermore, by sharing the historical context in which the whole text of Genesis was first revealed, the creation narrative recapitulates that context for everyone who reads it. Hence, to read the 'bodiless' creation narrative is nevertheless to be led back to a corporeal sense that determines the text at the most profound level, where the living unity of the whole book of Genesis is perceived.

Identifying the unique character of the Song's 'bodilessness'

What is most remarkable about Origen's hermeneutical approach to the Song is that he judges it to be an exception to all of these features characteristic of other Scriptures. By contrast with these, Origen situates the whole book of the Song, as a textual unity, in the category of 'bodiless' texts. The 'bodilessness' that he perceives in the Song transcends the incorporeality of drama and *dramatis personae* depicted in the text to embrace the text considered as a whole. In other words, Origen conceives of the whole Song (vis-à-vis a single literary unit) as a text that, in the final analysis, has no 'body' in his ordinary hermeneutical sense—no historical context for its recitation and no embodied author or speaker.

[43] *Hom. in Gen.* 1.7 (SC 7bis. 40–2). Origen also names as such 'stars' Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, David, and Daniel; each of these 'saints (*sanctorum*), in proportion to his grandeur (*secundum magnitudinem suam*), pours out his light to us', principally through the inspired books.

The hermeneutical, and hence theological, difference of the Song determines Origen's reading of the whole text. The nature of this difference may be summarized as follows:

(1) The Song of Songs, in part and in whole, has no historical limit.

(2) The Song of Songs, in part and in whole, has no corporeal limit.

(3) The Song of Songs is unique as to the mode of its prophetic mediation.

(4) The Song of Songs, as a text, is utterly 'bodiless'.

All of Origen's descriptions and qualifications of the Song in the great *Commentary* point to these conclusions. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, the structure of his exegesis of the Song also manifests his perception of the Song's theological and hermeneutical uniqueness. We shall examine these issues most closely in the final chapter of this study. The next part of this chapter, however, will scrutinize Origen's affirmations of the Song's special way of possessing its 'body', paying special attention to the metaphysical terms of Origen's reasoning.

THE SONG OF SONGS AS 'WHOLE BODY': *LOGOS* AND THE UNITY OF THE 'BODILESS' TEXT

The 'whole body' of the Song of Songs

Throughout the Prologue of the *Commentary* Origen explicitly attests to the Song's special mode of hermeneutical incorporeality. A crucial text for assessing Origen's perception of the Song's 'bodilessness' appears at the beginning of his discussion, where he affirms the mystical character of the nuptial drama portrayed in the Song:

For it is called a drama, such as the enactment of a story on the stage, when different characters are introduced and, some coming and others departing, the structure of the narrative is completed amongst a diversity of

movements. Which things this Scripture contains singly in their order, and its whole body is formed by mystical utterances.[44]

Origen begins here to lay out the contours for correctly interpreting the Song. This short passage presents a résumé of the main themes of his hermeneutics in terms of the special attention that the expositor must give the Song. Indeed, brief though it is, it is nonetheless of the greatest importance for appreciating Origen's whole vision of the Song. Deciphering the hermeneutical significance of this passage—especially his assertion that 'its whole body is formed by mystical utterances' (*totumque eius corpus mysticis formatur eloquiis*)—depends upon what Origen means by 'whole body' (*totum corpus*). However, before we can determine the meaning of 'whole body', we must first show that Rufinus' Latin translation of the phrase is reliable.

It is common knowledge that scholars, beginning as early as Jerome,[45] have long maintained towards Rufinus' translations a considerable wariness, more recently reinforced and extended by P. Koetschau's critical methodology in his influential German edition of *On First Principles*.[46] Such wariness is understandable, given, on the one hand, Rufinus' occasional bowdlerization of Origen's writings and, on the other, a certain insensitivity to subtle refinements of Origen's vocabulary. 'The most critical point is that Rufinus himself had not comprehended the principal facets of his master's thought', writes P. Tzamalikos.[47] Tzamalikos argues persuasively against relying on Rufinus' translation of the *On First Principles* for accurate renderings of Origen's discussions of time, eternity, and eschatology.

[44] 'Drama enim dicitur, ut in scaenis agi fabula solet, ubi diversae personae introducuntur et, aliis accedentibus, aliis etiam discedentibus, a diversis et ad diversos textus narrationis expletur. Quae singula suo ordine scriptura haec continet, totumque eius corpus mysticis formatur eloquiis', *Cant.* prol. 1.3 (SC 375. 82), my translation.

[45] Jerome, *Apol. contra Ruf.* 1.6–8 (*SC* 303. 18–26).

[46] Koetschau's edition places Greek fragments, taken from often hostile sources, on the same footing as Rufinus' Latin text, creating the impression that Rufinus has frequently altered or suppressed controversial statements in Origen's original. See Koetschau's rationale for this procedure in his preface to *De Principiis* (*GCS* 22), p. cxxviii. These views have been broadcast in the English-speaking world through the influential—and often excellent—translation of G. W. Butterworth, which reproduces the conjectural reconstruction of the *GCS* edition.

[47] *The Concept of Time in Origen* (Berne, 1991), 8.

He shows from extensive and varied analysis of Origen's extant Greek corpus that Origen does, in fact, employ a delicately nuanced technical lexicon in exploring these matters. Unfortunately, Rufinus obscures this subtlety, not so much by any deliberate revisions as by a simple failure to comprehend the metaphysical charge of Origen's words. Therefore, in the case of '*totumque . . . corpus*', it might be possible that Rufinus has translated a hermeneutically innocent Greek phrase into language that implies too much.

But, in fact, Rufinus' translation of the expression 'whole body' seems to represent a very different case from what Tzamalikos has in mind. Notwithstanding Tzamalikos' reservations, it is necessary to take into consideration a position now quite widely respected by the academic community—namely, that Rufinus' intention is not to 'cover up' Origen's real meaning but to communicate it faithfully. Thanks largely to the scholarship of pioneers like G. Bardy and M. Wagner, as well as the more recent studies of M. Simonetti, and H. Görgemanns and H. Karpp, preliminary to their own editions of *On First Principles*, it is now possible to say with confidence that, in large measure, Rufinus succeeds in doing so.[48]

Now, in a matter as recondite as Origen's metaphysics of time and eternity, it is unfortunate but nevertheless forgivable that Rufinus should translate 'terms such as "before", "after", "earlier", "later", "younger", "older" ', with 'no consciousness of their significance'.[49] With '*totumque . . . corpus*', however, all that is required of Rufinus is simply to recognize that, in Origen's writings, the word 'body' almost always functions theologically or hermeneutically. He is not required to appreciate fully or precisely what that function is. Since Rufinus himself had already translated Book 4 (the scriptural section) of *On*

[48] G. Bardy, *Recherches sur l'histoire du texte et des versions latines du De Principiis d'Origène* (Paris,1923); M. Wagner, *Rufinus, the Translator: A Study of his Theory and Practice as Illustrated in his Version of the Apologetica of S. Gregory Nazianzen*, Washington, DC, 1945. See also M. Simonetti (tr.), *I Principi di Origene* (Turin, 1968), 9–26; H. Görgemanns and H. Karpp (ed. and tr.), *Origene vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, Texte zur Forschung 24 (Darmstadt, 1976), 32–46. In a short but very helpful appendix to his *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford, 1991), A. Scott surveys the gradual progress made over the last seventy years in salvaging Rufinus' reputation as a translator (Appendix A, 168–72); I have relied on Scott for many leads in this area.

[49] Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen*, 8.

First Principles some years earlier, he could not have been unaware that '*totumque*... *corpus*', attributed to the text of the Song, would suggest a special hermeneutic sense—or, at least, a theological meaning—to any knowledgeable reader of Origen's works. We are not, at this point, arguing definitely that Origen uses 'body' with a hermeneutical sense in this passage but rather that it is very unlikely that Rufinus would have substitued '*totumque eius corpus*' for some less hermeneutically charged expression in Origen's original.

It is safe to say that the 'whole body' in this passage refers, minimally, to the whole Song conceived as a textual unity. Significantly, moreover, antique Greek can use 'body' (*σῶμα*) in just such a literary-formal sense, much as Latin often does. For example, *sôma* and its derivatives may denote the entirety, the whole or the mass of a thing, including a written work. Aristotle, for instance, writes of the 'body of the proof' (*τὸ σῶμα τῆς πίστεως*), and Longinus of the 'body of the text' (*τὸ σῶμα τῆς λέξεως*).[50] It is also significant that *sôma* may equally refer to a full text as contrasted with the gist or outline (*ὑπογραφή*) of the text.[51] Nor is this use of *sôma* unknown in early Christian literature. There, it may designate, variously, the entire visible text (...*ὡς τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὸ ὕφος τῆς προφητείας ὑπαγορεύει*...),[52] the unity of a text (*οἱ τὸ σῶμα τῆς γραφῆς διασπῶντες*),[53] or simply a volume or book.[54]

If Origen's Greek original had used *sôma* to refer to the Song as a literary unity, much as one might refer 'a body of work' or 'the body of the essay', it would have been a use entirely consistent with Greek idiom. In fact, it would also be consistent with examples of Origen's own usage in his surviving Greek works. An interesting and revealing instance occurs at the beginning of Book 6 of the *Commentary on John*. Origen, now in ecclesiastical exile from Alexandria, returns to the exegetical project that had been interrupted by controversy with Bishop Demetrius:

50 Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1354a15; Longinus, *Rh.*, 188 H.

51 *Berliner griechische Urkunden*, Ägyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin (Berlin, 1895), 187.12.

52 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7.16.96.2 (*SC* 428. 290).

53 John Chrysostom, *Hom. in II Cor.* 2.2 (3.270D).

54 See Procopius of Gaza, *Gen.* proem (M.87.21A): *ἓν*... *σῶμα τῆς γραφῆς ὡς ἑνὸς καὶ μόνου τὰς ἁπάντων ἡμῖν ἐκθεμένου φωνάς*; Joannes Moschus, *Prat.* 134 (M.87.2997A): *βιβλίον ἔχον ὅλην τὴν νέαν διαθήκην*... *ἐν σώματι πολὺ καλῷ*.

I pray that God will be with me, and will speak as a teacher in the porch of my soul (θεὸν διδάσκαλον ὑπηχοῦντα ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμῶν παρεῖναι εὐχόμενοι), so that the building (οἰκοδομή) I have begun of the exposition of the Gospel of John may arrive at completion (τέλος). May God hear and grant that the body of the whole work (τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ὅλου λόγου) may now be brought together, and that no interruption may intervene which might prevent me from following the sequence of Scripture (τοῦ εἱρμοῦ τῆς γραφῆς).[55]

Origen conceives of his *Commentary on John* as a building under construction. The task before him is to bring this building to its completion (τέλος) as a finished piece of architecture. The 'body of the whole work' (τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ὅλου λόγου), then, corresponds quite simply to the text as a literary unity, projected as the rational organization of all the written building-blocks that must now be assembled to complete it.

The latitude of Greek diction as well as Origen's own customary use of *sôma* helps to tip the scales in favour of the conclusion that Rufinus' phrase 'whole body' (*totum corpus*) faithfully and literally reflects the Greek original. Indeed, the evidence considered above supports, at the very least, a plausible claim that Origen's Greek phrasing speaks of *sôma*, perhaps 'καὶ τὸ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ' or, if his language here follows the pattern set in the passage from the *Commentary on John* above, 'καὶ τὸ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ'.

What, then, does Origen mean by the term 'whole body'? We shall concentrate upon two points of inquiry: (1) Origen's doctrine of 'body'; and (2) the full sense of Origen's complete expression, '[the Song's] whole body is formed of mystical utterances'. With reference to the first point, our analysis will bring to light how Origen conceives of all bodies as bearing a wholeness that is given by participation in the unity of *logos*. His identification of this *logos* with the author's presence to the 'body' of a text will remain crucial to a proper understanding of our position. Discussion of the second point, then, will show that what Origen calls the 'whole body' and 'mystical utterances' (*mystica eloquia*) of the Song represents a special, in fact unique, instance of the *sôma–logos* relationship.

[55] *Jo.* 6.10–11 (*SC* 157. 134).

'Body' and Logos in the Song of Songs

By '*totumque* ... *corpus*' (τὸ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα), we must ask, does Origen refer only to the literary-formal unity of the Song (i.e. as the whole text) or does he use it simply in the special hermeneutical sense brought to light in *On First Principles* 4.2.3—as the 'obvious' (πρόχειρον) aspect of the text and the doctrine delivered to beginners? In fact, the contrast between form and meaning assumed by this question is inconceivable to Origen. A broad examination of his writings reveals that he does not conceive of any real distinction between the literary-formal sense of 'whole body'and its hermeneutic sense. Quite simply, this is because Origen's hermeneutical conception of the Scriptures' somatic element includes and accounts for all of their literary, grammatical, and formal characteristics.

As we shall see, the 'body' of any written text is, according to Origen's conception, the form that *logos* assumes to become sensible (after a manner) and hence communicable. In a fragment from the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen clearly explains this doctrine, appealing first to the analogy of 'body' and 'book' and second to their common 'generation' from a single shared *logos*:

> Just as this uttered word is untouchable and invisible according to its own nature, but when written in a book and, as it were, become bodily, then indeed is seen and touched, so too is it with the fleshless and bodiless Word of God; according to its divinity it is neither seen nor written, but when it becomes flesh, it is seen and written. Therefore, since it has become flesh, there is a book of its generation.[56]

Origen's purpose here is to describe the commonplace mystery that something which really subsists only in an intellectual substance—the *logos* abiding in the *nous* or *logikos*—can inform corporeal substances (like the air of speech or the matter of paper and ink) with its own identity.

[56] ὥσπερ ὁ λόγος οὗτος ὁ προφορικὸς κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν ἀναφής ἐστι καὶ ἀόρατος˙ ὅταν δὲ ἐν βιβλίῳ γραφῇ, καὶ οἱονεὶ σωματωθῇ, τότε καὶ ὁρᾶται καὶ ψηλαφᾶται˙οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἄσαρκος τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος καὶ ἀσώματος, οὔτεὁρώμενος, οὔτε γραφόμενος κατὰ τὴν θέοτητα, ἐπειδὴ ἐσαρκώθη, καὶ ὁρᾶται καὶ. γράφεται.διὰ τοῦτο ὡς σαρκωθέντος καὶ 'βιβλος' ἐστὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ 'γενέσεως', *Comm. in Mt.* Fr. 11 (*GCS* 41/1. 19), my translation.

The key to this mystery lies, for Origen, in the formal distinction to be made between the word considered in 'its own nature' (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν) and the word 'become bodily' (σωματωθῇ), that is, in association with a material nature. Origen's careful qualification of his point of view (οἱονεὶ; 'as it were') reveals that the 'embodiment' of the 'spoken word' (ὁ λόγος οὗτος ὁ προφορικός) actually involves no change or becoming in the nature of the word itself. The coincidence of these two different natures—the spiritual and material—happens in a way congruent both with the immutability of the word and with the mutability of material nature (ὕλη).

Origen's resolution of this seeming opposition—his discovery of the metaphysical basis of congruence—between word and matter in the 'body' of the scriptural text follows a line of reasoning similar to that of his metaphysical analysis of physical corporeality. It is obvious, after all, that in the passage above Origen has constructed an analogy between the textual 'body' and the physical body. We shall now briefly lay out several principles crucial to assessing not only the meaning of Origen's reference to the 'whole body' of the Song but also his conception (1) of how the Song effects unity in the soul, (2) of how it possesses its unique hermeneutical properties, and (3) of how these are related to the rest of Scripture.

When Origen considers material bodies in themselves, the attribute that he first discovers is their composite nature. For example, the human body includes its own particular diversity of material 'members . . . operations and dispositions' (*membra, efficientia, affectus*).[57] Together, these comprise what Origen identifies in the *Commentary on the Song* as the 'outer human', to whose nature, acts, and imagination the somatic sense of Scripture appeals so strongly.

Furthermore, Origen stresses—and particularly in the *Commentary on the Song*—that the identity, character, and (scriptural) names of these 'members' hold the greatest significance, since they reveal an analogous but immaterial diversity in the soul or 'inner man'. Thus, human bodies are made up of 'hands', 'eyes', a 'head', 'ears', 'feet', a 'womb', 'throat', 'tongue', 'teeth', 'arms', and likewise of a complete physical sensorium.[58] In their turn, these individual bodies, like cells or organs, together associate to form larger corporeal aggregates,

[57] *Cant.* prol. 2.9 (*SC* 375. 98).

[58] *Cant.* prol. 2.9 (*SC* 375. 98–100).

these aggregates forming bonds in communities of ever-increasing magnitude. In this way, the 'whole world' (*mundi totius*), Origen asserts, itself forms 'one body' (*corpus . . . unum*), since it is 'arranged in diverse parts and functions' (*in diversis sit officiis ordinatus*). [59]

Ultimately, then, every physical body (*sôma*) as Origen conceives of it—whether the least element, an animal body or the entire cosmos—constitutes a 'whole', an integrated unity. A cooperative harmony of parts, the body reveals in its own unity the one end towards which all of its members are drawn. Likewise, the body's order manifests the structuring power of the 'limit' or 'boundary' (πέρας) that defines contours of its form.[60] In the body of the material cosmos:

God recalls . . . these very [embodied] creatures (*has ipsas creaturas*), so different from each other in mental quality, to one harmony of work and endeavour (*in unum quendam revocat operis studiique consensum*); so that, diverse though the motions of their souls may be (*ut diversis licet motibus animorum*), they nevertheless combine to make up the fullness and perfection of a single world (*unius tamen mundi plenitudinem perfectionemque consumment*), the very variety of minds tending to one end, perfection (*ad unum perfectionis finem*).[61]

So, the body of the world comprises many parts ('creatures' = *creaturae*). Considered by themselves, these parts represent the greatest diversity (*varietas . . . mentium*) and, problematically, tremendous potential for conflict.[62] Yet, considered in view of their harmonious cooperation (*in unum consensum*), these parts together constitute the 'perfection of a single world' (*unius mundi perfectio*). Origen

[59] 'Quamius ergo in diversis sit officiis ordinatus, non tamen dissonans atque a se discrepans mundi totius intellegendus est status; sed sicut corpus nostrum unum ex multis membris aptatum est . . .', *Princ.* 2.1.3 (*SC* 252. 238).

[60] Miller (Cox), ' "In My Father's House" ', 323–7.

[61] *Princ.* 2.1.2 (*SC* 252. 236).

[62] Indeed, the world's countless multiplicity of bodies has arisen because the souls united to them have torn them away from the primal integrity of the original creation: 'the diverse motions of rational creatures (*diversos motus rationabilium creaturarum*) and their varying opinions (*variasque sententias*) have given rise to the diversity of this world (*causam dedisse diversitatis mundo*)', *Princ.* 2.1.3 (*SC* 252. 240). However, U. Bianchi wrongly contends that, for Origen, this fall from primal integrity also 'implies incorporation', i.e. that it is a fall into the body as such ('Some Reflections on the Ontological Implications of Man's Terrestrial Corporeity According to Origen', in *Origeniana Tertia*, 156).

associates the wholeness (i.e. fullness and perfection) of the world with its unity as a body, conceiving of it, in effect, as a 'whole body'—like the Song.

By their very nature, then, all bodies are 'composed of "many members" ' (*ex multis membris*), but this manifold complexity tends always towards 'to one end, perfection' (*ad unum perfectionis finem*).[63] Origen finds this ontological principle confirmed in Paul's ecclesiological extension of 'body' to embrace the corporate being of the Church of many members (1 Cor. 12: 12) or, as he writes in the *Commentary on the Song*, the church comprising many souls (*ex multis animabus* ≈ *ex multis membris*).[64] The same idea appears in the *Commentary on John*, where Origen now shows the present unity of the Church to adumbrate the future unity of the whole cosmos elevated, in the *apocatastasis*, to a perfect unity of existence: 'Then [at the resurrection] the many members (τὰ πολλὰ μέλη) will be the one body (τὸ ἕν ἔσται σῶμα), for all the members of the body, despite their multitude, will become one body'.[65]

Origen's metaphysics precludes the possibility of there being any 'whole'—including a 'whole body'—that is not finally identical with or contingent on some intellectual unity. Even if Origen, reasonably, identifies the 'whole body' of a material being as a formation of a diverse multiplicity of parts, he recognizes at the same time that the physical body can never be fully understood in terms of quantity alone. There is in the human body a unifying principle, namely the 'one soul' (*una anima*), that surpasses the diversity of bodily members even as it contains them—*et ab una anima continetur*—in its own unity.[66] Even the whole cosmos finds its unity, as organism, in the life and intelligence of the World Soul; brought together into one

[63] *Princ.* 2.1.3 (*SC* 252. 238).

[64] *Cant.* 2.6.13 (*SC* 375. 388). J. A. Lyons specifically notes the correspondence between the unity of the cosmic body and the unity of the ecclesial body; see *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin: A Comparative Study* (Oxford, 1982), 77, 143.

[65] *Jo.* 10. 237 (*SC* 157. 524). See also *Hom. in Ps.* 36.2.1 (*SC* 411. 96), where Origen asserts that Christ's Body is 'the whole human race, perhaps even the entire universality of creation' (*Christus ergo cuius omne hominum genus, immo fortassis totius creaturae universitas corpus est*...). For an inquiry into this universal vision of the Body's redemption, see V. D. Verbrugge, 'Origen's Ecclesiology and the Biblical Metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ', in Kannengieser and Petersen, 283–5.

[66] *Princ.* 2.1.3 (*SC* 252. 238).

by the activity of its own unifying principle, all creatures with their many motions become, quite literally, 'an immense, monstrous animal' (*animal immensum atque immane*), a vast creature possessed of *psyche*.[67]

Origen's account is basically Stoic in its organic dynamism, though it is tempered by Aristotelian hylomorphism and a Platonic emphasis on the soul's immateriality. His metaphysical terminology for soul–body relations reflects these emphases. In *On First Principles*, Origen speaks of the soul both as the body's 'formative principle' (*plasma*) and the 'life principle which contains the essence of the body' (*quibus insita ratio ea, quae substantiam continet corporalem*).[68] Further, in an important fragment from his work *On the Resurrection*, preserved by Methodius, Origen identifies this same principle as the 'spermatic logos' (ὁ σπερματικὸς λόγος), a Stoic expression for what Origen also calls here the seed-principle (ὁ κόκκος) of the body; he goes on to explain that this *logos* confers its own 'pattern' (τὸ παράδειγμα) and 'form' (εἶδος) upon the elements of the body.[69] As M. Edwards explains, 'the εἶδος is the growth of which the λόγος is the seed'.[70]

Origen finds further confirmation of this principle (i.e. that bodily wholeness subsists in a living intellectual unity) in Wisdom 11: 20, according to which God created the world as an ordered relation of 'number and measure' (*numerus et mensura*; LXX ἀλλὰ πάντα μέτρῳ καὶ ἀριθμῷ καὶ σταθμῷ διέταξας).[71] Origen reads this phrase as making precise ontological references: 'number' to 'rational creatures or minds' (*rationabiles creaturae vel mentes*), 'measure' to the 'bodily matter' (*materia corporalis*) sufficient to their needs.[72] A true 'body' is, for Origen, really and intrinsically one (i.e. number), and this unity exceeds anything that any of the parts alone or taken together (i.e. measure) can contribute. Thus, in Origen's metaphysics the

[67] *Princ.* 2.1.3 (*SC* 252. 238).

[68] For *plasma*, see *Princ.* 1.7.4 (*SC* 252. 214); for *ratio*, see *Princ.* 2.10.3 (*SC* 252. 380).

[69] Methodius, *Res.* 24 (*GCS* 27. 249, 13 ff.); Edwards ('Origen No Gnostic', 33) indicates the importance of this text.

[70] 'Origen No Gnostic', 33. For discussion of *eidos* in the context of this same text, see H. Crouzel, 'Mort et immortalité selon Origène', *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 79 (1978), 182–5, and 'Les critiques adressées par Méthode et ses contemporains à la doctrine origénienne du corps ressuscité', *Gregorianum* 53 (Rome, 1973), 679–716.

[71] *Princ.* 2.9.1 (*SC* 252. 352–4).

[72] *Princ.* 2.9.1 (*SC* 252. 352–4).

'body' surpasses the sum of its parts but falls short of the limiting *logos* from which it receives its form.

Even so, the relation that Origen discerns between the corporeal whole and the informing *logos* remains essentially and necessarily dynamic at every level of conception, since the *logos* must be actively present to, with, and in a body's material elements if it is to give its unity of being, identity, and meaning to them. The body of the whole creation—both in its present tentative spatial harmony as well as in the melody of its sweeping aeonic history—is intelligibly one because God's mind is present to it as designer, artificer, and provident overseer. The physical cosmos is organically one because organized by the activity of a great living intelligence.

The body, therefore, is a body precisely because its 'word' is in it. Occupying the liminal juncture of spirit and matter, the 'body', in its very unity, wholeness, and identity, shows forth its informing *logos*. Because of this real unity in being, it is possible for the soul to discern and so penetrate to the pure *logos* alone. Indeed, in the final analysis, the body should be such a servant to its informing word that the word alone is visible in it.

The inspired text as *logos*-being and 'body'

Any coherent and complete text or book is, on Origen's interpretation, just such a corporeal 'whole'. As with all other real bodies, the text's unity—as a whole—derives from the particular *logos* that informs it. Clearly, then, Origen can mean by *logos* something that surpasses the magnitude of a single 'word', in the usual English sense. Even if the 'spoken *logos*' in the passage quoted earlier from the *Commentary on Matthew* (fr. 11) refers only to one word, Origen elsewhere confers on *logos* the widest range of meanings: single word, phrase, expression, sentence, thought, text, and metaphysical principle of unity. Hence, the entire unity and intelligibility of the Song, revealed in and through its 'whole body', is as much a single *logos* as what is signified by any individual word of the text.

Therefore, when Origen speaks of wishing to complete the 'body of the whole work' (*τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ὅλου λόγου*) of his *Commentary on John*, the 'body' to which he refers is the visible, sensible literary form through which the whole underlying idea of the text—

ὁ ὅλος λόγος—comes to expression. The 'body' of the *Commentary*'s organizing conception, Origen tells us, will be complete when all of its anticipated parts (ideas, letters, words, phrases, etc.) are 'brought together' as a well-ordered work. The relationship between *sôma* and *logos* in this text, then, is the same as that which Origen expresses in the Matthew commentary fragment quoted earlier. The *logos*, though purely intellectual, draws into itself 'material' properties, thereby animating, so to speak, a corporeal form with all its virtualities of meaning and movement. Whereas the 'word' is intrinsically whole and indivisible, the 'body' of the text is whole only by participation. What the textual 'body' possesses as a 'whole' it receives from the wholeness of its 'word' (*logos*).

Origen's hermeneutical interest in the forms of expression—the *logoi*—employed by scriptural texts is apparent in his statement that the Song is 'formed of mystical utterances' (*mysticis formatur eloquiis*).[73] These 'utterances' (*eloquia*) comprise the entire *logos*-content of the Song. Alongside this emphasis on *logos* stands Origen's familiar care for the underlying textual matrix or structure, here identified as the 'structure of the narrative' (*textus narrationis*) and the 'order' of deeds and words in the Song. Through this 'structure', the meanings inherent in individual *logoi* of the Song (the 'mystical utterances') are linked sequentially to each other according to God's design in harmony with the principles of *akolouthia* ('sequence') and *heirmos* ('connection'). Furthermore, this underlying structure and order is not really something distinct from *logos* but, in fact, manifests the intelligible unity of conception that is the *logos* of the entire Song itself.

In short, Origen reads the Song as he would any text of Scripture—as a 'corporeal' being that is both an order of parts and, at the same time, a real and indivisible unity. He identifies the parts of the Song's narrative, severally, as the 'different characters' (*diversae personae*), their various 'introductions' (*introducuntur*), their 'comings' (*accendentibus*) and 'departings' (*descentibus*), their 'diversity of movements' (*a diversis et ad diversos*), and their many 'utterances' (*eloquiis*). Moreover, he relates these parts dynamically to the Song's unity, designated both as 'this Scripture' (*scriptura haec*)

[73] *Cant.* prol. 1.3 (SC 375. 82).

that 'contains' (*continet*) the parts of the text, and as the wholeness of the text considered as 'whole body'(*totumque eius corpus*).[74] The unity of the Song is, therefore, a formal constituent of the text. It is, in fact, nothing other than the underlying, substantial form of the text. This fact accounts for the real equivalence sustained by Origen between the unity of the Song as a 'whole body' and its *logos*, which fully manifests the divine Logos.

It should be stressed that Origen does not conceive of this unity in the Song as merely literary or grammatical, as simply a sum of its parts. In terms of its unity, the 'whole body' of the Song corresponds to 'the body of the whole *logos*' (*τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ὅλου λόγου*) referred to in the passage quoted earlier from the *Commentary on John*, and the syntactic similarity between the two phrases is not accidental. The 'whole body', insofar as it is whole, reveals its indivisible unity of conception—its *holos logos*. By setting the 'whole body' of the Song alongside its multiple, discursive elements ('comings and goings'; 'mystical utterances'), Origen also points to the formal—and hence hermeneutical—relation of parts and the whole in the Song, which derives from its inherent, unifying and organizing *logos*. And, just as parts and the 'whole body' stand in an ordered relation, the former taken up into the latter, so is the 'whole body' (with its parts) ordered towards the *logos* that actuates it as 'body'.

THE TWO REGISTERS OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Origen's differentiation of modes of presentation in the Song

In Origen's view, nothing in or of the Song of Songs exists apart from its underlying *logos*, which we now may see to be nothing other than the text's all-embracing unity of purpose. Even its words, doctrines, and teachings are interior to this unity, which is metaphysically anterior to any contents. The 'contents' of the Song do not, indeed cannot, exist apart from the underlying *skopos*- and *logos*-unity of the text. They are called into being and set into order by the creative reality of God's *skopos* most deeply interior to the text. The *skopos* of

[74] *Cant.* prol. 1.3 (SC 375. 82).

the Song, then, really comprehends two dimensions or registers: (1) a subordinate dimension (a 'lower register') in which love, as teaching aim, is represented discursively through the parts or contents of the Songs; and (2) a superior dimension (an 'upper register') in which this love-*skopos* is fulfilled principally through the *logos*-unity of the text.

This distinction between registers corresponds to what D. Dawson, referring to Origen's exegesis of the Song, describes as 'the double character of Solomon's Song as a work about love'.[75] Dawson catalogues a number of expressions in the *Commentary on the Song* that point to this double character:

> Origen begins his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* by making a distinction between what Solomon wrote (a 'little book') and what he sang (a 'marriage-song'): Solomon 'wrote in the form of a drama' a song that he 'sang under the figure of the Bride' (*Cant.* Pro. 1). Origen first highlights the character of Solomon's song as a written, narrative drama by pointing out how the various speakers (Bride, Bridegroom, friends of both) interact with each other—such is what is meant by saying that the song 'was written in dramatic form' (*Cant.* Pro. 1). But along with the comings and goings of the various characters, presented 'one by one in their own order', the 'whole body' of the work also consists of mystical utterances' (*Cant.* Pro. 1).[76]

According to Dawson, Origen underlines in the form of the Song itself a 'distinction' between: (1) 'what Solomon wrote . . . and what he sang'; (2) the 'little book' (*libellum*) and the 'marriage-song'; (3) the 'written, narrative drama' and the 'whole body' of the work, consisting of mystical utterances. The fact (of which Dawson makes note) that the *Commentary on the Song* begins with this distinction of registers underscores the importance of this twofold dimensionality to Origen's whole conception and interpretation of the Song.

Appropriately, then, it is near the end of his initial discussion of the Song's *causa praecipua* or *skopos* (i.e. love) that Origen begins to suggest a distinction between a 'lower register' and an 'upper register' latent in the structure of the text. Here, Origen intends to tell the reader precisely how the love that he has just discussed is present to

[75] 'Allegorical Reading in Origen', 27.
[76] Ibid. 26–7.

the text as its *causa praecipua* or *skopos*. The passage turns upon an important distinction between 'singing' and 'speaking':

The Scripture before us, therefore, speaks of this love with which the blessed soul is kindled and inflamed towards the Word of God (*hunc ergo amorem loquitur praesens scriptura, quo erga Verbum Dei anima beata uritur et inflammatur*); it sings by the Spirit the song of the epithalamium whereby the [Bride] is joined and allied to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom (*et istud epithalamii carmen per Spiritum canit, quo ecclesia sponso caelesti Christo coniungitur ac sociatur*), desiring to be united to Him through the Word, so that she may conceive by Him and be saved through the chaste begetting of children, when they—conceived as they are indeed of the Word of God, and born and brought forth by the spotless Church, or by the soul that seeks nothing bodily, nothing material, but is aflame with the single love of the Word of God—shall have persevered in faith and holiness with sobriety.[77]

Origen identifies two modes through which the Song fulfils its aim of reproducing divine love in the Church or the soul. 'Speak[ing] of this love' describes the 'lower register'. 'Sing[ing] by the Spirit' identifies the 'upper register'. Let us now examine the Song's 'double character' as a spoken and a sung text more closely.

First, the Song 'speaks of this love' (*hunc ergo amorem loquitur*); that is, it teaches the doctrines of love, much as Origen himself has just taught at length on love's divine nature. Furthermore, this 'speaking' bodies forth a representation of the Bride's nuptial progress to union with the Bridegroom as well as her growth into maturity within it. Origen has already told us that this representation is formed entirely of speech-acts. Through it—and them—the Christian is taught the science of contemplative love (i.e. the enoptic discipline); but also, more profoundly, the Christian hears the very words of love and desire that he must mystically speak if he desires to become Christ's Bride: 'so that as a fair soul with her Spouse you may sing this Song of Songs (*canere canticum canticorum*) too.'[78]

Second, Origen states that the Song 'sings by the Spirit the song of the *epithalamium*' (*et istud epithalamii carmen per spiritum canit*). He closely associates this 'singing' with the 'joining' (*coniungere* = ἑνάω) and 'alliance' (*sociare* = κοινωνέω) of the Bride to the Bridegroom.

77 *Cant.* prol. 2.46 (*SC* 375. 122).
78 *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (*SC* 37bis. 68).

In this 'singing', the Song becomes a living portrayal of the nuptial goal towards which the Bride journeys. This goal, of course, is not ultimately the joining and the alliance per se but rather the One—the Bridegroom—to whom the Bride longs finally to be united. Yet Origen shows us with an almost poetic concision that the 'song' which calls the Bride is also the very thing that sets her 'aflame with the single love of the Word of God' (*solo Verbi Dei amore flagrante*). The Bridegroom is himself the final cause of the desire that moves the Bride to meet him, and this Bridegroom—precisely as final cause—is present to the text of the Song as its primary singer.

By introducing this distinction between the 'speaking' and 'singing' of the Song, Origen reveals his intention to lead the reader to consider the form of the text—its real underlying unity as such. Rather than laying emphasis upon the Song's individual teachings, doctrines, or themes (as 'speaking'), Origen gives theological priority to that intelligible act (or event) of nuptial instruction that the Song *is* (as 'singing'). In other words, before looking towards the Song's many parts and contents, Origen first strives, with his spiritual ear attuned, to perceive the Song itself as a unique mode of Christ the Bridegroom teaching his Bride or, more exactly, constituting her very being as Bride through his creative song.

In this passage, therefore, Origen has already begun to parse the Song's structure in a way that allows him not only to emphasize the Bridegroom's uniqueness as the first principle of the Bride's desire—as he who sets her 'aflame with the single love (*solo amore*) of the Word'—but also to identify him as the unique principle and source of the Song itself and so ultimately of its power to generate loving desire in the reader. On the one hand, then, the Song ('the Scripture before us') teaches the doctrines of divinely passionate love ('speaks of this love with which the blessed soul is kindled and inflamed') and of its proper object ('the Word of God'). But on the other hand, and more deeply, it imparts this love efficaciously. It can do this, Origen explains, because the Song draws its power wholly from the Bridegroom's unique act of singing. Through the activity of the Spirit, who directs all right readings of Scripture, the Song itself realizes ('it sings'; *praesens scriptura . . . canit*) the presence of the Bridegroom's song (*epithalamii carmen*) in the reader's own hearing. The text is the

agent of the Bridegroom's re-presentation and of the reader's transformation in him.

We should notice moreover that Origen ascribes to the *epithalamii carmen* the essential characteristic of heavenly *erôs* itself, namely the power to effect the soul's (i.e. the reader's) nuptial union with the Word. Origen's expression 'love *with which* the blessed soul is kindled and inflamed towards the Word of God' (*hunc amorem . . . quo erga Verbum Dei anima beata uritur et inflammatur*) shows not only a structural parity with the expression 'song of the epithalamium *whereby* the Bride is joined and allied to Christ' (*epithalamii carmen . . . quo ecclesia sponso caelesti Christo coniungitur ac sociatur*) but also a real equivalence to it.[79] In other words, Origen implies the closest identity between the enkindling 'love' (*amor*) of the Song and the 'song of the epithalamium' (*epithalamii carmen*) itself. As B. Neuschäfer explains, the Song's *Inhalt* (i.e. its 'content') of *amor* is manifested in, through, and as the *Form* of the *epithalamii carmen*.[80] *Amor* and *carmen* are coinciding expressions of the Bridegroom's loving acts.

Indeed, Origen presents the *epithalamii carmen* as the final form and cause of saving *amor*, since it effects the nuptial union that is the fulfilment of love's desirous longing. At one and the same time, then, the Song 'speaks' of the very thing—the divine *erôs*—that in its profoundest centre it also is, insofar as the Bridegroom sings it to the reader through the Spirit's agency. Origen invests an immense and even absolute sanctifying power in this 'song of the epithalamium', which is nothing other than the Song itself.

The two genres of the Song as a distinction of performative modes and hermeneutical registers

We must turn now to explore a further crucial implication of Origen's expression *epithalamii carmen*, indicated in the tautological construction of the expression itself. *Carmen*, after all, adds nothing that is not already contained in the concept *epithalamium*. Thus it is

79 i.e. 'love' : 'song of the epithalamium'; 'with which' : 'whereby'; 'kindled and inflamed' : 'joined and allied'.

80 *Origenes als Philologe*, 80.

understandable that R. P. Lawson should translate *epithalamii carmen* as 'song of the wedding',[81] since one can more easily imagine how the heavenly wedding, rather than the heavenly marriage-song, might create this sanctifying nuptial union; perhaps Lawson has conjectured that Rufinus' translation was simply inaccurate. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Rufinus could not himself have been unaware of the difference between τὸ ᾆσμα τοῦ ἐπιθαλαμιοῦ and τὸ ᾆσμα τοῦ νυμφεύματος. *Epithalamii carmen* is almost certainly an unmuddled rendering of Origen's original.

Why, then, does Origen use this admittedly peculiar form—*epithalamii carmen*—to describe the Song, insofar as the text 'sings' it 'by the Spirit'? We have already made note of one inference that Origen almost certainly means us to draw: the text of the Song itself is really indistinguishable from the heavenly marriage-song and therefore really initiates the reader into the mystery of the bridal-chamber. Yet, Origen could have conveyed the same idea without tautology—for example, *et istud epithalamium per spiritum canit*. The reason for this pleonasm (*epithalamii carmen* or τὸ ᾆσμα τοῦ ἐπιθαλαμιοῦ) must lie elsewhere. We shall argue that it lies specifically in Origen's own intention to strengthen the contrast between the two sets of genres, discursive modes, and pedagogies that are proper to the Song and constitutive of its character.

To grasp what Origen implies in the expression *epithalamii carmen*, we must turn once more to the distinction that he draws between the Song's two modes of discourse: it 'speaks' (*loquitur*); and it 'sings' (*canit*). Origen associates the *epithalamii carmen*—and hence the genre of epithalamium itself—with the second of these two discursive modes. Thus, it would seem that, for Origen, insofar as the Song 'sings' (i.e. to the extent that it is a song as such), it must be read, heard, and received under the genre of epithalamium. Yet, we have seen already that Origen also locates the Song under the genre of drama, the 'whole body' consisting of the 'mystical utterances' of several players. The parity between the phrase *mystica eloquia*, describing the dramatic construction of the Song, and Origen's description of the Song's discursive mode of 'speaking' (*loquitur*) is striking

[81] *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 38.

(*eloquia* ≈ *loquitur*). We may infer, then, that insofar as the Song 'speaks', it comprises 'mystical utterances' and so is a drama.

Origen therefore construes the Song, on the one hand, as a spoken drama, and, on the other hand, as a sung epithalamium. For Origen, in other words, drama and epithalamium are ultimately not merely overlapping genres but distinct modalities of the text—two different ways in which Origen understands the text to be 'performed' by different voices in different settings. When read as the 'mystical utterances' of several performers (i.e. Bridegroom, Bride, friends) with their manifold 'comings and goings', the Song takes on the aspect of drama. Yet, when read as the mystical utterance of one singer (i.e. Christ the Bridegroom) in his unique advent to the Bride, it assumes the character of epithalamium. In this way, epithalamium and drama coincide perfectly in the Song without confounding their distinctive natures.

Dawson has similarly concluded that the two genres to which Origen has allocated the Song are not simply two ways of conceiving of a single performance by one set of 'actors' or 'singers'. Rather, they correspond to and impart the Song's characteristic love-pedagogy in two distinct ways. He writes:

> Just what sort of relation does an allegorical reading of the Song of Songs forge or discern between the written text as sequential narrative ('drama') and the text as a 'whole body' comprised of mystical utterances ('song')? What is the relation between its 'horizontal' character as narrative sequence and its 'depth dimension' as mystical utterance?[82]

Dawson recognizes that Origen's division of genres is meant to clarify a real distinction of modalities or, as he says, of horizontal and depth 'dimensions', in the Song. They are, in other words, distinct ways of reading a single text. According to Dawson, drama—the 'horizontal' dimension—corresponds to 'the written text as sequential narrative'. Epithalamium or song—the 'depth dimension'—corresponds to the Song read 'as a "whole body" comprised of mystical utterances'.

Is there not a more straightforward way to read Origen's definition of the Song as 'an epithalamium . . . which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama' (*epithalamium . . . dramatis in modum a Solomone*

[82] 'Allegorical Reading in Origen', 27.

conscriptum)[83] than the one that this discussion, in harmony with Dawson's insights, has proposed? It might be more economical, for example, to suppose that Origen simply thinks the Song to be a single epithalamium, yet sung at the time of the heavenly nuptials by multiple voices (i.e. the Bridegroom, Bride, and their friends) enacting their parts 'dramatically'. On this view, which is admittedly a more obvious reading, the Song heard as epithalamium is not incommensurable with the Song heard as drama; rather, the Song is simply an epithalamium performed as a play.

Some of Origen's own descriptions seem to lend support to this assessment. At the beginning of the *Commentary*, for instance, he moves immediately from describing the Song as an 'epithalamium . . . in the form of a drama' to an outline of the several interacting voices that one encounters in the text as both speaking and singing. Similarly, in *Homily 1 on the Song*, he places the dramatic performance of the Song at the heavenly nuptials, making the actors into the singers of the text: 'We have thus four groups: two individuals (the Bridegroom and the Bride); and two choirs answering each other (the Bride singing with her maidens, and the Bridegroom with his companions).'[84] A few lines on, he completes the thought:

> These are the characters in this book, which is at once a drama and a marriage-song (*fabula pariter et epithalamium*). And it is from this book that the heathen appropriated the epithalamium, and here is the source of this type of poem; for it is obviously a marriage-song that we have in the Song of Songs. The Bride prays first and, even as she prays, forthwith is heard. She sees the Bridegroom present; she sees the maidens gathered in her train. Then the Bridegroom answers her; and, after He has spoken, while He is still suffering for her salvation, the companions reply that 'until the Bridegroom recline at his table' and rise from His Passion, they are going to make the Bride some ornaments.[85]

On this reading, the pivotal acts and scenes of the drama coincide with (1) the principal steps and stages in the marriage of the Bridegroom and Bride, and (2) the 'mystical utterances' that comprise the script recorded as the text of the Song. Again, as above, Origen does

[83] *Cant.* prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80).
[84] *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (*SC* 37bis. 70).
[85] Ibid.

not distinguish epithalamium from drama as dimensions of the text but only as aspects of a single performance.

We must acknowledge that, in the two *Homilies on the Song*, Origen does in fact portray the Song only as a dramatically structured marriage-song. Even so, we must not assume that the *Homilies* represent his last word on the matter at hand. As elementary works, they are not intended to provide the kind of complete reading of the Song that he will later develop in the *Commentary*—which is Origen's definitive statement on the Song as a whole.[86] We would therefore not deny that this more 'obvious' account of how Origen conceives of the Song as being 'at once a drama and a marriage-song' (*fabula pariter et epithalamium*) is correct, at least within the limits of the evidence that it considers. Nevertheless, this account fails to incorporate crucial material from the *Commentary*, where the greater sophistication of Origen's audience and the broader freedom with which he may appeal to metaphysical principle allows him to introduce a deepened, more ramified conception of the Song and its unique hermeneutical structure.

The Song of Songs as the Bridegroom's unique performance of his marriage-song

Thus we discover that the Prologue of the *Commentary*, which begins by suggesting that the Song truly 'teaches us what words this august and perfect Bridegroom used in speaking to the [Bride] who has been joined to Him,'[87] gradually and with increasing clarity focuses the reader's attention upon the special sense in which the Bridegroom-Logos is the unique source and singer of the Song, when it is read as an epithalamium. This focus becomes sharpest in the last pages of the Prologue, where Origen fully exposits the title 'Song of Songs'. Three short texts in particular highlight Origen's point of view:

(*a*) All those [other songs], then, that were uttered by them [i.e., prophets or angels] were the introductory songs sung by the Bridegroom's friends;

[86] We might note, for example, that the ecclesiological/psychological allegory is an essential interpretative device in the *Commentary*; yet the Bride does not appear plainly as Church or soul in the homilies.

[87] *Cant.* prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80).

but this song is the very one which was at last to be sung—in the guise of an epithalamium—by the Bridegroom himself, when about to take his Bride; in which song the Bride no longer wants the Bridegroom's friends to sing to her, but desires indeed to hear the words of the Bridegroom himself, present in person, and so she says: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth'.[88]

(*b*) . . . this song that Solomon [i.e. as living type of Christ] sang is the Song of Songs not only in relation to those that were sung before it, but also in respect of those that followed it in time.[89]

(*c*) And the fact that in the Song of Songs, where now perfection is shown forth, he [i.e., Solomon as type of Christ] describes himself neither as Son of David, nor as king, enable us to say further that, since the servant has been made as the lord, and the disciple as the master, the servant obviously is such no longer: he has become as the Lord.[90]

Taken together, these texts clearly reveal Origen's intention to place the whole text of the Song, as epithalamium, in the mouth of the Bridegroom alone. In passage (*a*), Origen emphasizes the fact that the Song must be heard as a unity of presentation (*unum*) from the Bridegroom-Logos himself (*ipsi . . . sponso*), now truly present to the Bride. Second, he underscores the Song's real identity, precisely as text, with the Logos' unique marriage-song: 'this song is the very one' (*istud vero unum canticum est*). When the reader rises to this conception of the text, no other singer than the Logos himself is to be heard.

Passages (*b*) and (*c*) strengthen this interpretation. In passage *(b)*, Origen ascribes the singing of the Song to Solomon, whom he here presents as the author and prophetic forth-speaker of the whole text as a discrete literary production. The emphasis now has shifted from

[88] 'Illa ergo omnia quae per illos adnuntiabantur cantica erant per amicos sponsi praecedentia; istud vero unum canticum est, quod ipsi iam sponso sponsam suam suscepturo epithalamii specie erat canendum, in quo sponsa non adhuc per amicos sponsi cantari sibi vult, sed ipsius iam sponsi prasentis audire verba desiderat dicens: "Osculetur me ab osculis oris sui" ', *Cant.* prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 148).

[89] '. . . hoc quod Solomon cecinit Canticum esse Canticorum non tantum eorum quae prius, sed et quae postmodum canenda videbantur', *Cant.* prol. 4.13 (*SC* 375. 156).

[90] 'Et adhuc quod in Canticum Canticorum, ubi iam perfectio ostenditur, neque filius David neque rex scribitur, potest etiam hoc dici quia, cum factus fuerit servus sicut Dominus et discipulus sicut magister, videtur iam neque servus esse servus, factus videlicet sicut Dominus', *Cant.* prol. 4.28 (*SC* 375. 166).

where it lay at the beginning of the Prologue. There, Solomon writes the drama, and he sings only 'under the figure of the Bride' (*instar sponsae*),[91] that is, as the primary player of the Bride's role in the nuptial drama. Passage (*b*), by contrast, now places Solomon at the creative origins of the Song itself. And here, Solomon stands forth vividly as a figure not of the Bride but of the Bridegroom, an insight advanced even more boldly in passage (*c*): 'the servant obviously is such no longer: he has become as the Lord' (*iam neque servus esse servus, factus videlicet sicut Dominus*).

Hence, when Solomon sings as the prophetic recipient of the Song, he does so 'under the figure of the Bride' and thus as participant in the nuptial drama. But when he sings as the unique prophetic source of the Song, he does so 'under the figure of the Bridegroom' (to paraphrase Origen) and thus as the performer of the Bridegroom's epithalamium. We see, then, that Origen thinks his twofold distinction of epithalamium and drama to be a necessary deduction from Solomon's twofold role in the production of the Song.

None of these observations, however, should lead us to the conclusion that Origen excludes the Bride from the Song's re-presentation as epithalamium. So much is already obvious from his explicit inclusion (see passage (*a*) above) of her acts of 'desiring' and 'speaking', alongside the Bridegroom's act of 'singing'. Yet, careful analysis of Origen's words shows that he just as plainly means to subordinate her activity to that of the Bridegroom, completely and at every level, even as he includes it in his portrait of the Song's spiritual production. For Origen includes and embraces in this Song (*in quo*)—which, we must recall, he has just identified as the Bridegroom's own epithalamium—not only the Bride's speech-acts (*dicens*) but also her very desire to hear the Bridegroom speak (*ipsius iam sponsi praesentis audire verba desiderat*). Her acts are part of—an ongoing musical theme within—the creatively all-comprehending act of the Bridegroom as he sings his marriage-song.

The participative relationship between drama ('lower register') and epithalamium ('upper register')—and likewise between the diverse speech-acts (of Bridegroom and Bride together) comprised by the former and the utterly unique speech-act (of the Bridegroom

[91] *Cant.* prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80).

alone) that constitutes the latter—simply makes manifest in textual form the ontological participation by which the created Bride comes by grace to share in the being of the uncreated Bridegroom, her history in his eternity, and her body in the indestructibility of his spirit; for Origen, the Bridegroom is with the Bride, even as she is in him and he in her. Indeed, in the *Commentary on the Song* Origen expressly sets forth the mystery that the love-life of the Bridegroom and the Bride subsists really and pre-eminently in the greater unity, being, and love of the Bridegroom alone. He formulates the metaphysical paradox in the astonishing final sentences of Book 1:

> And do not be surprised that we speak of the virtues loving Christ, since in other cases we are wont to regard Christ as Himself the substance of those very virtues. You will find this often in the Divine Scriptures, adapted to the context and conditions; we find Him, for example, called not only Justice, but also peace and Truth. And again, it is written in the Psalms: 'Justice and Peace have kissed' [Ps. 84: 11]; and 'Truth is sprung out of the earth, and Justice hath looked down from heaven' [Ps. 84: 12]. All of which things are said to *be* Himself, and to embrace Him (*quae utique omnia et ipse esse et rursum ipsum dicuntur amplecti*). Moreover, He is both called Bridegroom and named Bride (*sed et sponsus idem dicitur, idem etiam sponsa nominatur*), as it is written in the prophet: 'As a bridegroom hath He decked me with a crown, and as a bride hath He adorned me with jewels' [Is. 61: 10].[92]

Christ, then, not only embraces all the virtues as their substance and being. He also receives their embraces, as the pre-eminent good towards whose unity these virtues incline. The virtues, Origen shows us, are infused with the same *erôs* that draws the Bride-soul irresistibly to the Bridegroom; they are, in fact, the form of the Bride-soul's ever increasing likeness to his perfection. Appropriately, then, Origen assimilates the multiplicity of the virtues to the unity of the Bride's loving desire towards her Beloved.

Yet, Origen shows us, even the Bride's unity does not ultimately stand alongside and apart from the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom, we see, is present to the Bride on a 'lower register' and an 'upper register'. On the 'lower register', he is present with and alongside her as the manifest object of her love and desire. On the 'upper register', however, the Bridegroom's presence is fundamentally creative, principial,

[92] *Cant.* 1.6.13–14 (*SC* 375. 256).

and utterly unique. Here, he is present to the Bride in four ways: (1) as the first principle (the *logos* and *archê*) of her very existence as a rational being; (2) as the source of the loving mode of well-being that makes her to be Bride; (3) as the origin of the *philanthropia* that is the 'reason for his coming' to dwell with his Bride at the 'lower register'; and finally (4) as the eternal pattern or 'script' of all the nuptial interactions of the heavenly pair. Thus the Bride's love cannot stand 'over against' the divine object of her love, since he, as heavenly *Erôs*, is the ground of her being and her loving.[93] It is the Logos (as 'Bride') present in her who embraces the Logos present to her (as 'Bridegroom').

Thus there arises a clear parallel to Origen's development of the Song as 'whole body'. Just as the Song is a single *totum corpus* comprising many *mystica eloquia*, so also is it 'one song' (*unum canticum*) comprising the words of both of the Bridegroom (*ipsius . . . sponsi*) and the Bride. Again, the Song-as-epithalamium comprehends, creates, and calls forth the Song-as-drama, just as the Bridegroom alone (i.e. the Logos) comprehends, creates, and calls forth the being of the Bride (i.e. the *logikos*) in relation to himself.

Delineating the two registers in relation to the *logos*-structure of the Song

In Origen's reading the two genres of the Song correspond to the manifoldness (drama) and unity (epithalamium) of the text. This is

[93] Even more than as the teacher of divine *erôs*, Christ appears in the *Commentary* and *Homilies* as the principle of *erôs* itself, or, rather, as the person of divine *Erôs* himself. The Bridegroom, in other words, is the source and substance of the very love in which he indoctrinates the soul. Origen explains: 'So it makes no difference whether we speak of having a passion for God (*utrum amari dicatur Deus*), or of loving Him (*aut diligi*); and I do not think one could be blamed if one called God Passionate Love (*amorem*), just as John calls him Charity (*caritatem*). Indeed, I remember that one of the saints, by name Ignatius, said of Christ: "My Love is crucified", (*meus autem amor crucifixus est*) and I do not consider him worthy of censure (*nec reprehendi dignum*) on this account', *Cant.* prol. 2.36 (*SC* 375. 116). The Johannine identification of God as *Agapê* (1 John 4: 8), conjoined with Origen's own doctrine of the real equivalence of true *erôs* and divine *agapê* (cf., *Cant.* prol. 2.25 (*SC* 375. 108); prol. 2.33 (*SC* 375. 114)), allows Origen to elevate *erôs* itself to the status of the premier theological virtue. *Erôs*, as much as *agapê*, endures forever (1 Cor. 13: 8).

not, of course, to say that these aspects of the Song are entirely identical with one another. Rather, they are related in and through the principles—*logos* and *logoi*—in which the whole text is ultimately grounded. The *logos* that makes the Song to be one 'whole body' is, in Origen's judgement, that which makes it to be epithalamium as well, while the *logoi* that are the 'members' and parts of this 'whole body' coincide with the Song's dramatic utterances.

The following columns summarize the relationships between the 'upper register' and 'lower register' of the Song, as Origen conceives of them:

Register:	Upper ('Song')	Lower ('of Songs')
Genre:	epithalamium	drama (or dialogue)
Voice:	Bridegroom alone	Bridegroom, Bride, and their companions
Action:	sing (*cano*)	speak (*loquor*)
Principle:	*logos*	*logoi* (*mystikoi*)
Form:	'whole body'	'mystical utterances' (*mystica eloquia*)

At the 'lower register', Origen hears the Song as drama/conversation, made up of many separate speech-acts uttered as *mystica eloquia* by several speakers—Bridegroom, Bride, friends, and companions. At the 'upper register', however, Origen broadens his range to hear the text as the utterance of its primary speaker only, whom the book names as 'Solomon' and whom Origen identifies as the Bridegroom. These two registers are not, however, unconnected to each other. What one reads at the lower register as the 'mystical utterances' of several players appears at the upper register as the discursive phases of a single 'utterance' or speech-act, the lower register subsisting in the upper register as *logoi* within *logos* or as songs (ᾄσματα) within the unity of the one song (ᾆσμα).

To Origen's mind the intellectual leap from the lower register of the Song (i.e. parts and 'mystical utterances') to its upper register (i.e. the 'whole body' and *logos*) involves a transformed perception of the personal, intellectual beings or Being really at work in the text. More precisely, it represents a transposed knowledge of *who utters the Song*. Hence, Origen will present the Song's organizing *logos* and its attributes by initiating his reader into the mystery of the text's

authorship, in which is discovered the absolute terminus of both spiritual interpretation and spiritual encounter.

By analysing Origen's correlation of Solomonic authorship to the *logos* of the text, we shall be equipped to ascertain how Origen can discern in the 'whole body'—the textual unity—of the Song a 'bodiless' character as well. We shall discover that, whereas it is historically limited human authorship that finally conditions all other scriptural books and texts as 'body', a special mode of divine authorship is seen by Origen to raise the textual 'body' of the Song to a register that is purely spiritual, intellectual, and incorporeal. The 'bodilessness' of the text, as an aspect of its perfect character, flows from its real identity with the eternal marriage-song of Christ the Bridegroom. We shall show that Origen discerns in the Song the contours of a 'whole body' transposed, in a spiritual manner, to that intelligible level where God in his Logos is the 'All in all' of the Song. Only a reading that perceives the text of the Song as limited exclusively by the superhistorical, purely intelligible being of the Bridegroom-Logos can be counted as adequate to Origen's judgement of the text.

5

Origen on the Hermeneutical Finality of the Song of Songs

IDENTIFYING THE ESCHATOLOGICAL *TOPOS* AND *KAIROS* OF THE SONG

The prophet Solomon as the proper focus for establishing the Song's interpretative context

Since authorship and origin figure so centrally in Origen's hermeneutical judgements concerning each and every biblical book, it will come as no surprise that he devotes special attention to the person of the prophet Solomon and to Solomon's relation to the text of the Song. Indeed, the first words of the *Commentary* should alert us to Origen's interest in specifying and interpreting the role of Solomon with respect to the Song: '. . . this little book is an epithalamium . . . which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama and sang under the figure of the Bride . . .'[1] Already, Origen begins to intimate that Solomon plays a role which is not only authorial (*a Solomone conscriptus*) but also typological (*instar nubentis sponsae*). The two roles are integrally related. For it is only in view of Solomon's authorial, prophetic activity that Origen will seek the contextual realities of *topos* and *kairos* that limit and condition Solomon (as *hagios* and *logikos*) and the underlying *logos* of his Song, with its 'whole body' (i.e. 'upper register') of 'mystical utterances' ('lower register').

[1] 'Epithalamium libellus hic, id est nuptiale carmen, dramatis in modum . . . a Solomone conscriptus, quem cecinit instar nubentis sponsae . . .', *Cant.* prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80–1).

Only at the end of the Prologue does Origen finally explore the significance of the fact that the Song names 'Solomon' as its author.[2] His aim in this section is to specify the exact sense in which the historical Solomon should be thought of as the author of the Song, and the ensuing discussion is linked closely to Origen's analysis of Solomon's authorial role in the three complete books attributed to him in the canon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song. His discussion, which proceeds with great subtlety in the final section of the Prologue, enlarges specifically upon the question of why Solomon, 'who served the will of the Holy Spirit in these three books' (*Qui videtur in istis tribus libellis ministrasse voluntati Spiritus sancti . . .*),[3] identifies himself with three different appellations and under three distinct aspects in the title verses of these three books.

The prophetic context of Solomon's three books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs

Origen does not approach these names as a matter of isolated literary-historical interest. Rather, they provide keys to the meaning and function of the scriptural texts themselves. Since the several permutations of Solomon's name that appear in the opening verses of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song are themselves 'words' of the scriptural text, they too must be subject to his rule that 'Holy Scripture never uses any word (*unumquemque . . . sermonem*) haphazard and without purpose'.[4]

Precisely because these names constitute part of each book's title verse—that is, the verse that truly names the book considered as a unity of revelation—Origen will seek as part of their inspired content an exact qualification of the spiritual meaning, form, and function of each whole text. Thus Origen understands that when read in conjunction with the proper names of the books themselves (i.e. their titles), these authorial names reveal the character of each book conceived in—or, indeed, as—its underlying unity of conception, its *logos*. They accomplish this end by revealing the spiritual intelligence—the

[2] *Cant.* prol. 4.15–35 (*SC* 375. 156–72).
[3] *Cant.* prol. 4.15 (*SC* 375. 156).
[4] *Hom. in Cant.* 1.8 (*SC* 37bis. 98).

logikos, *nous*, or *hagios*—in which this *logos* is conceived and the contextual factors (*topos* and *kairos*) that 'limit' it.

With respect to the book of Proverbs, for example, Origen concludes that by naming himself in Prov. 1: 1 as 'son of David, who reigned in Israel' (*filius David, qui regnavit in Istrahel*),[5] the prophet Solomon communicates two different but analogically related ideas. First, he precisely denominates the aspect under which he, the historical author, writes Proverbs—as the temporal monarch ruling in the earthly kingdom of Israel: 'in [Proverbs] he mentioned only the nation over which he reigned (*gentem solam in qua regnaverat*'.[6] Second, however, Origen identifies the aspect under which the superhistorical Logos reveals himself as the personal speaker/author of the whole text. So at this stage, Christ is heard as 'king in Israel—not in Jerusalem, as yet; because, although we be called Israel by reason of faith, we have not yet got so far as to reach the heavenly Jerusalem (*ad Hierusalem caelestem*)'.[7] We see, then, that Origen (1) situates the historical Solomon in the *topos* (i.e. Israel) and *kairos* (i.e. the reign in Israel) that define the limits of his awareness and self-presentation in the act of writing Proverbs and then on this basis, (2) transposes each element to a spiritual and superhistorical order.

Origen follows the same pattern in his treatment of the book of Ecclesiastes, its title, and Solomon in relation to both. In Ecclesiastes, he explains, the Christian arrives at the spiritual *topos* and *kairos* only anticipated in Proverbs—namely Jerusalem, who is 'our celestial Mother' (*matrem nostram . . . caelestem*),[8] where the reader may find Christ as 'the true Ecclesiast' (*verus Ecclesiastes*).[9] He infers this definite progression from the spiritual *topos* and *kairos* of Proverbs to the *topos* and *kairos* at hand precisely because, here, Solomon calls himself 'Ecclesiastes, the son of David, king of Israel in Jerusalem' (*Ecclesiastae filii David regis Istrahel in Hierusalem*).[10] As with Proverbs, then, Origen has arrived at this spiritual *topos* and *kairos*

[5] *Cant.* prol. 4.15 (*SC* 375. 156).

[6] *Cant.* prol. 4.15 (*SC* 375. 158).

[7] 'Rex . . . in Istrahel, necdum in Hierusalem, quia, etsi Istrahel dicamur propter fidem, nondum tamen in hoc perventum est ut ad Hierusalem caelestem pervenisse videamur', *Cant.* prol. 4.19 (*SC* 375. 160).

[8] *Cant.* prol. 4.19 (*SC* 375. 160).

[9] Ibid.

[10] *Cant.* prol. 4.15 (*SC* 375. 156).

through an anagogical process that begins with the historical Solomon-Ecclesiast, who reigns in the earthly Jerusalem. This earthly Jerusalem is the limiting *topos* (i.e. *locum regni*)[11] that the earthly Solomon has in view at the time of prophetic inspiration, while the *kairos* is the time when 'he reigned' (*regnaverat*) over 'both the nation and the seat of government, Jerusalem' (*et gentem . . . et locum regni*),[12] and this context, present to the prophetic mind, conditions the organizing *logos* of the whole book.

Hence, Origen recognizes the limiting function of earthly *topoi* (i.e. Israel and Jerusalem) and *kairoi* (i.e. the reign) in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, bounding the texts at their prophetic, authorial horizons. Furthermore, on Origen's reasoning, the given names of Solomon in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes communicate both a corporeal sense and a spiritual sense. Their corporeal sense specifies the author as the embodied, historically conditioned prophet-king who utters each text as his own teaching, while their spiritual sense names Christ and the spiritual setting in which Christ himself utters the text as his doctrine. The corporeal meaning of Solomon's names attests, then, that when one reads Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, one always 'hears' the prophet's voice, even as the prophet's word mediates the voice of the Logos himself.

To draw his reader into the mystery of authorship in the Song and so into the particular situation of *topos* and *kairos* in which 'Solomon' stands relative to the book as a whole, Origen turns to the same source that has already provided him revealed knowledge about author (= *logikos*) and whole text (= *logos*) in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes—namely, the title ('The Song of Songs, that is Solomon's own'; *Canticum Canticorum quod est ipsi Solomoni*).[13] Origen takes the words 'Song of Songs' (*Canticum Canticorum*), which form the first half of the opening verse, to name the book as a 'whole body', denoting the *logos* that gives the text its unity of form and meaning. It is, however, by means of the second half of the Song's opening verse—'which is Solomon's' (*quod est ipsi Solomoni*)—that Origen will seek to penetrate beyond and behind the *logos* of the Song to its

[11] *Cant.* prol. 4.15 (*SC* 375. 158). [12] Ibid.

[13] *Cant.* prol. 4.16 (*SC* 375. 158); this is the first time that Origen gives the title of the Song of Songs as a whole.

personal source and the conditioning *topos* and *kairos* in which he stood at the moment of the Song's revelation.

What becomes most apparent from Origen's analysis is the distinctive and unique manner in which Solomon inhabits the *topos* and *kairos* of the Song. This distinctiveness emerges as Origen develops his analysis of the specific differences of *topos* and *kairos* that are signified in the title verses of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song. In beginning his study of the sequence of Solomon's three books, Origen reflects that the task of interpreting the data revealed in their titles is especially difficult for the exegete:

And although it is difficult (*difficile*) for me both to be able to examine the differences in these books and arrive at any explanation of them (*aut perscrutari et attingere posse horum differentias*), and also to expound them clearly and commit them to writing when they have been thus searched out, nevertheless, as far as our own intelligence and our readers' apprehension allow, we will try to unfold these matters briefly.[14]

He attributes this difficulty to the nature of the specific 'differences' (*differentiae*) signalled by the titles of these books, which challenge both examination and exposition. Thus, when Origen proceeds to consider specifically what the opening words of the Song indicate about the 'Solomon' who is named as its singer and author, he takes care to indicate the locus of this 'difference':

But in the Song he writes neither the name of the nation, nor the place where he reigns, nor even that he is the king at all, nor yet that he had David for his father; he only says 'the Song of Songs that is Solomon's own'.[15]

Origen observes that none of those contextualizing factors which bind the author of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to a particular geographic locale or *topos* ('nation'; 'place'), an historical era or *kairos* (the period when he 'reigns'), a social or political role ('king'), or a biological lineage ('David for his father') occupy the prophet's vision at the germinal moment of the Song. The 'Solomon' of the Song does

[14] *Cant.* prol. 4.16 (*SC* 375. 158).

[15] 'In Cantico vero Canticorum neque gentis nomen, neque locum in quo regnet, neque omnino quod rex sit, neque quod patrem David habeat scribit, sed tantummodo Canticum ait Canticorum, quod est ipsi Solomoni', *Cant.* prol. 4.16 (*SC* 375. 158); Lawson 51.

not delimit his relation to the text in the same way as does the Solomon of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

When Origen sets these curious lacunae against the much fuller qualifying expressions found in the titles of Solomon's other two books, what comes into focus for him is clear evidence of prophetic intention. Solomon means something about the text by withholding here what he has elsewhere provided. To determine the significance of this seeming omission for Origen's understanding of Solomon's identity, as he is named in the first verse of the Song, we shall now ask how Origen situates this 'Solomon' in the Song's conditioning *topos* and *kairos*.

Seeking the *topos* and *kairos* of the Song of Songs

To identify with Origen the *topos* and *kairos* of the Song, we must expand our investigation beyond his exegesis of Solomon's three books to include his whole discussion of the significance invested in the title of the Song.[16] It is at the beginning of this section that Origen most clearly identifies the *topos* of the Song, namely in his interpretation of the sequence of six 'introductory songs' (*cantica praecedentia*) which both lead to and are superseded by the text of the Song and the spiritual reality re-presented in it.[17] He introduces this song sequence for the first time at the beginning of the third major section of the Prologue, where he investigates the range of meanings encompassed by the title of the Song: 'But we must now enquire for the first time what are the songs in relation to which this song is called "The Song of Songs" '[18] At this point in his discussion, Origen readies himself to identify six specific song-texts that precede the Song—the seventh song-text—in the order of the canon.[19] These

[16] *Cant.* prol. 4 (*SC* 375. 146–72).

[17] *Cant.* prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 148).

[18] 'Nunc autem requiramus primo quae sint cantica quorum canticorum hoc esse canticum dicitur', *Cant.* prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 146).

[19] In the *Commentary*, Origen identifies these six subordinate, introductory texts in the 'scale of songs' as follows: the Song of Moses (Ex. 15: 1–19); the Song of the Well (Num. 21: 17–20); the Song of the Rain (Deut. 31: 30–32:44); the Song of Deborah (Judges 5: 1–31); the Song of David on the Day of his Deliverance (2 Sam. 22: 1–51 [= LXX 2 Kings 22] ≈ Ps. 18/17); and the Song of David for Asaph (1 Chron. (= 1 Par.) 16: 7–36 (< v. 23 ≈ Ps. 104/105; > v. 23 ≈ Ps. 95/96)). A nearly identical list appears

songs, in turn, will themselves come to signify the underlying anagogical structure of higher meanings that lead finally to the 'spirit' of Scripture, signified and re-presented in the Song.[20]

Both L. Brésard and O. Rousseau describe Origen's sevenfold sequence as 'the scale of songs' (*l'échelle des cantiques*).[21] This expression identifies not only the ascending, step-wise character of the sequence but also its intrinsic musicality.[22] Each text is itself not only a song but also a distinct note in the heptatonic 'scale' that climaxes and concludes in the Song. Furthermore, these six texts—and notwithstanding their historical origins—really communicate a participative experience of the six mystical songs that lead the soul to what

at the beginning of the first homily. It differs only in that Homily 1 names the Song of the Vineyard (Is. 5: 1–7) as the sixth song in the sequence where the Commentary gives 1 Chron. 16: 7–36. Notwithstanding this difference, the underlying sevenfold structure of songs (6 + the Song) remains the same.

[20] How Origen has selected these six songs from among the great variety of OT song-texts remains a question that has not yet received a satisfactory answer. R. P. Lawson (tr. pp. 321 n. 100) and Rousseau ('La plus ancienne liste', 120) postulate a liturgical *ordo* behind this sequence. F. Manns argues at length for Origen's direct dependence on a Jewish antecedent (e.g. the two *Mekilta* of R. Ismail and R. Simon, the Targum on the Song of Songs, and *Midrash Zuta*; see 'Une tradition juive dans les commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques d'Origène', *Antonianum* 65 (Jan.–Mar. 1990), 3–22). Neither proposal stands up to scrutiny as presented, the former because it is wholly conjectural, the latter because it tailors the evidence to suit the hypothesis. I suggest that it is most likely that Origen has simply listed in order those texts that (*a*) are identified as 'song' (ᾆσμα or ᾠδή) in the LXX, and (*b*) precede the Song in the order of the canon, excluding the Psalms. This hypothesis is convincing for several reasons: (*a*) Origen states that he has chosen texts that are 'called songs' and arranged them by 'date'; (*b*) the song-texts chosen by Origen are the only ones preceding the Song that the Hebrew text identifies with some form of *shîr* ('song'; 'singing'); (*c*) it coheres with Origen's hermeneutical emphasis on the interconnected significance of both name and sequence in Scripture; (*d*) it explains why Origen does not include in the song-sequence other texts that might seem to be more appropriate choices (e.g. the Song of Anna (1 Sam. 2: 1–10), the exclusion of which both Brésard and Manns ponder, is not called a 'song' ; Anna only 'spoke' (LXX εἶπεν) in 1 Sam. 1: 28).

[21] L. Brésard, 'L'échelle des cantiques', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 39 (1989), 3–25; O. Rousseau, introduction to *Homélies sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (*GCS* 37bis), 31.

[22] The theme of step-wise ascent to God appears not only in Platonic traditions to which Origen would have had access (e.g. Plato, *Symposium* 211C) but also in the Old Testament (e.g. Jacob's dream in Gen. 28: 12) and the New Testament (e.g. Paul's ascent to the third heaven in 2 Cor. 2: 12). On the theme of the spiritual ladder or scale, see E. Bertraud and A. Rayez, 'Échelle', in M. Viller, F. Cavallera, J. de Guibert, *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 4 (1960), 62–86., and T. Spidlik and J. Leclercq, 'Scala spirituale', in G. Pelliccia and G. Rocca (eds.), *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione* (1988), 1002–5.

is re-presented in the Song; to read these texts spiritually is precisely to hear them as superhistorical songs. It is therefore necessary that we make explicit the structure of Origen's reading of these six songs—individually and as a sequence—if we hope to identify correctly the superhistorical *topos* and *kairos* in which Origen situates both the origin and the mystical reality of the Song.

For each of the six songs that form the 'scale of songs', Origen identifies three elements that will become essential to his interpretation. These three elements correspond to the categories of *topos, kairos*, and *logikos/hagios* that we have already considered. Adherence to this pattern varies somewhat from song to song. Thus he may identify place and time as part of the same idea (e.g. 'he will sing . . . a second song, when he has emerged from the valley of Zared, which mean Strange Descent, and has come to the well . . . there he will sing and say . . .),[23] or telescope the pattern into the quoted verse itself (e.g. 'the fifth song . . . when "David spoke to the Lord the words of this song, in the day that the Lord delivered him out of the hands of his enemy" . . . ').[24] Whatever the variation, Origen always includes or alludes to place, time, and prophet as elements essential to the basic structure of his exposition.

Origen's procedure for finding the spiritual meaning in each of these six songs reproduces the basic pattern identified by K. Torjesen as fundamental to his reading of all Old Testament texts.[25] Torjesen summarizes this pattern as follows:

(1) Verse: quotation of the verse which provides the basis for the interpretation.

(2) Explanation: the explanation which describes the situation in which these words are meaningfully spoken.

(3) Hearer: the address to the hearer.

(4) Verse Repeat: repetition of the verse, this time as spoken by the hearer.

(5) Explanation/Hearer: explanation in the first-person voice, already includes relation to hearer.[26]

[23] *Cant.* prol. 4.6 (*SC* 375. 150). [24] *Cant.* prol. 4.10 (*SC* 375. 154).

[25] On the theological structure of Origen's exegetical procedure for reading OT texts, see Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 66–9, 138–74.

[26] *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 148.

According to Torjesen, this sequence of steps aims to bridge the apparent chasm between the antiquity of the text and the experience of the reader, so as to discover a timely application to the reader's life. However, the timeliness of the text does not, as Torjesen suggests, merely rest in the doctrines and propositional teachings recovered from it by the exegete. Its most profound timeliness—its truly universal applicability—lies in the fact that spiritual reading makes the reader a participant in the timeless spiritual reality typified by the context of the original revelation and its human revealer.

The aim of Origen's procedure is to introduce the reader into the context present through prophetic mediation at the 'limits' of the text and so to open the 'spiritual' meaning of the song even while conserving the formal elements that give each song a 'somatic' character as an historical event.

The same pattern holds more or less true for the remaining five songs in the introductory sequence, although in the interest of brevity he gives them only a cursory gloss. Throughout the discussion, Origen emphasizes the great importance that the whole original context of revelation holds for an authentic contemporary reading. Having fully imparted itself to the prophet and thence to the informing *logos* of each song, this context now becomes the setting to which the Christian is noetically 'transported', as it were, through reading and hearing the text.

Origen's method is rigorous and logical. Exegesis, he supposes, must necessarily proceed in this manner precisely because in these six songs the originating context (with its *logos*) is not identical with the spiritual context that renders each song useful to salvation. The reader must advance anagogically from the song-text's historical context (i.e. as 'letter' or 'body') to its superhistorical context (i.e. as 'spirit'). This advance does not occur without the reader's active cooperation. In the case of each of the 'six introductory songs', the reader must begin from this corporeal *topos* and *kairos* and rise by means of a Spirit-led intellectual act to the analogous spiritual *topos* and *kairos*, in which he—like the prophet originally—may now participate. This whole operation is reflected procedurally in Origen's five-stage formula that we examined above.

To read each song salvifically, the reader must shift his intellectual gaze from the corporeal context in which each song was *originally*

sung (i.e. its historical *archê;*) to the spiritual context in which that song is *always* sung (its superhistorical *archê;*).[27] According to Origen's reading, then, each individual 'step' (i.e. each song-text) that the Bride-reader takes towards the nuptial mystery of the Song is itself a self-contained movement of ascent from 'letter' (or 'body') to 'spirit'. Each stage that leads to the bridal chamber of the Song occasions a feast in the spiritual life, which is, O. Rousseau writes, 'une joie constante':

> Comme aux jours de la création, après chaque oeuvre, Dieu se disait à lui-mēme: *Et erant cuncta valde bona*, ainsi, après chaque étape de sa vie spirituelle, le chrétien chante.[28]

But Rousseau has merely paraphrased Origen's own words from the beginning of the first homily:

> Blessed likewise is he who understands songs and sings them—of course nobody sings except on festal days—but much more blest is he who sings the Song of Songs.[29]

In effect, each 'step' on the nuptial path of reading encapsulates the fundamental 'festal' structure of the whole path in its entirety, giving a hermeneutical foretaste of what lies ahead, yet mysteriously immanent, in the Song.[30] And in its unity, each 'step' prepares the reader for his next step on that path. The precise noetic distance that the reader must bridge in moving from 'letter' to 'spirit' in each song—which is an intellectual movement from lower to higher context—becomes the measure of his readiness to proceed to the next song.

[27] The real distinction between material and spiritual, temporal and supertemporal, and ultimately created and uncreated (John 1: 1) 'beginnings' is central to Origen's use and exegesis of the term *archê* ; see *Jo.* 1.90–124 (*SC* 120bis. 102–24).

[28] Introduction to *Homélies sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (*SC* 37bis), 32. For similar comments on the festive character of these songs, see Brésard, 'L'échelle des cantiques', 7 and 24, and Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 56–7.

[29] 'Beatus similiter et is qui intelligit cantica et canit ea—nemo quippe nisi in sollemnitatibus canit—sed multo beatior qui canit cantica canticorum', *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (*SC* 37bis. 64).

[30] Louth remarks perceptively on the psychological colour of Origen's festal spirituality: 'At every stage of the Christian life the soul sings: it is full of joy. This is characteristic of Origen's spirituality, which knows nothing of the cloud, the dark night, found in the mysticism of others. His is a mysticism of light'; see *The Christian Mystical Tradition,* 56–7.

The Song completes this sevenfold 'scale' of sacred songs, just as it also completes the sequence of Solomon's three books. Yet, when Origen arrives at the Song, he dramatically alters the exegetical pattern that holds true in his identification of the factors (*logikos, topos, kairos*) which condition and limit the *logoi* of the first six songs. For these six songs, as we have seen, Origen first specifies an historical singer (*logikos*), a sensible 'place' (*topos*), and a temporal 'moment' (*kairos*), which three only then become the basis of a spiritual reading encompassing the whole song. In the case of the Song, by contrast, he moves immediately and without any preliminary steps to the spiritual reading, locating the Song as a whole only in a spiritual context.

The *topos* of the Song of Songs

Where exactly does Origen locate the Song's *topos*? He answers this question in the following passage, which completes his exposition of the 'scale of songs'. Here, he indicates not only the finality of the Song in relation to the *akolouthia* of the whole song-sequence but also its exemplary and unsurpassable festal character:

> . . . by assessing the virtue of each song separately and collecting from them the grades of the soul's advance (*et requirens singulorum virtutes canticorum, atque ex his proficientis animae gradus colligens*) and putting together the order and sequence of things with spiritual understanding (*ac spiritali intelligentia ordinem rerum consequentiamque componens*), he will be able to show with what stately steps the Bride, as she makes her entrance, attains by way of all these to the nuptial chamber of the Bridegroom (*ostendere poterit quam magnificis gressibus incedens sponsa per haec omnia perveniat usque ad thalamum sponsi*), passing 'into the place of the wonderful tabernacle (*in locum tabernaculi admirabilis*), even to the House of God, with the voice of joy and praise, the noise of one feasting' [Ps. 41: 5]. So she comes, as we said, even to the Bridegroom's chamber, that she may hear and speak all these things that are contained in the Song of Songs (*ut perveniens usque ad ipsum, ut diximus, thalamum sponsi, ut audiat et loquatur cuncta haec quae continentur in Cantico Canticorum*).[31]

[31] *Cant.* prol. 4.14 (*SC* 375. 156).

Origen's analysis of *topos* in the first six songs might have led the reader to predict that he would similarly place Solomon's 'singing' of the Song in some historical *topos*. Instead of an earthly *topos*, however, Origen identifies the Logos-Bridegroom's heavenly 'nuptial chamber' (*thalamus sponsi*) and the 'wonderful tabernacle' (*tabernaculum admirabile*) as one and the same *topos* in which the Song may be sought and heard. The prophetic *topos* in which the Song is originally given and the spiritual *topos* that raises the Song's *logos* to a wholly incorporeal register are utterly identical. That is to say, the original and originating loci of revelation coincide fully in the Song, which is sung only in heaven.

According to Origen, the Bride achieves her advance to this *topos*—the heavenly *thalamum sponsi*—through the 'stately steps' (*magnifici gressus*) of a procession that prepare her for the wedding feast and nuptial mystery. These 'steps', Origen emphasizes, are shown forth as the spiritual meaning of the six song texts that mark, and indeed, are the reader's path to the Song. Thus for Origen, the Bride's nuptial way has been accommodated to the discursive structures of written language. The Bridal Way is, in brief, a textual reality. This insight explains, in part, why Origen employs his hermeneutical terminology of *akolouthia* here (i.e. *ordo et consequentia*), for it shows that the order of the Bride's 'stately steps' is also a coherent sequence of *logoi* and *lexeis*—of real song-texts recorded in Scripture.

Hence, through the reading of these texts, the Christian likewise walks the nuptial way to the Bridegroom's wedding-chamber, which is itself present as the text of the Song. And, just as Origen declares here that the Bride comes to the *thalamus sponsi* so as to 'hear and speak all these things that are contained in the Song of Songs' (*ut audiat et loquatur cuncta haec quae continentur in Cantico Canticorum*), so in *Homily 1 on the Song* he urges his hearers to 'make haste to understand and to join with the Bride in saying what she says, so that you may hear also what she heard' (*festina intelligere illud et cum sponsa dicere ea, quae sponsa dicit, ut audias, quae audivit et sponsa*).[32] The reader is fully transformed into Bride at the very moment when everything contained by the text of the Song is fully heard and spoken.

[32] *Hom. in Cant.* 1.1 (*SC* 37bis. 70).

In short, the Song, precisely as text, marks the end of the reader's long hermeneutical search to find the Logos as his supreme teacher, lover, and bridegroom in the inspired Scriptures. L. Brésard comments accordingly: 'C'est bien là cette septième étape de l'Échelle des cantiques, où après les six jours de marche parfois ardue, l'âme-épouse se repose, en ce sabbat nuptial.'[33] For the reader, no further 'movement' is necessary, since the proper finality of the Bride-reader's life of love and understanding has been reached. The reader, with the Bride, may rest in the Bridegroom's sabbatic repose.

How does Origen think that this understanding of the Song's *topos* ought to affect the reading, interpretation, and experience of the Song itself? In the six 'introductory songs', the Bride (as reader) must complete an intellectual movement from corporeal *topos* to spiritual *topos*, though of course his movement remains interior to the reading of the song-text itself. If the intellectual sabbatic 'rest' of the Bride-reader in the Song is to be total, as Origen envisions it to be, even this sort of intellectual movement must be brought fully to its consummation. That is, the reality present as the Song's immanent *logos* cannot and does not demand of the reader a movement from a corporeal *topos* to a spiritual *topos* as a requirement for entering the divine reality of the text. This explains why Origen's own exegesis of the Song in the context of the 'scale of songs' proceeds in only one stage—directly to nuptial finalities of the *thalamus sponsi* and *tabernaculum admirabile*, which are given fully and immediately to the comprehending reader now in-formed as Bride.

We can now better appreciate how this *topos* identified above—the nuptial *thalamum*—also completes the pattern begun in Origen's reading of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song as a single ordered curriculum. The transition from Proverbs to Ecclesiastes presents a shift of prophetic focus from 'Israel' to 'Jerusalem', and this represents for Origen a movement from a lesser to a greater 'spiritual' significance. In the Song, Origen (or the Christian)—now the Bride—comes to rest in the 'nuptial chamber' of the Bridegroom, a place more intimate than the 'Israel' that is the theological *topos* of Proverbs or 'Jerusalem', the *topos* of Ecclesiastes.

[33] 'L'échelle des cantiques', 25.

Finally, with the Song, Origen arrives at what he has already described as 'the wonderful tabernacle' and 'the House of God'. Thus, Origen gives to the destination anticipated in the *logos*-path of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes the same name as the religious, political, and geographical heart of Israel and Jerusalem: the Temple of Solomon. He does not, however, equate the earthly Temple with the prophetic *topos* of the Song—something the title verse of the Song would not permit. Instead, he reads title and texts in such a way that the mystery typified by the earthly Temple is known to be the heavenly reality that is really immanent in the Song as the *thalamus* of the Bridegroom.

The *kairos* of the Song of Songs

If Origen specifies a heavenly *topos* for the Song, what, then, is the *kairos*—the moment—in which the Song originates? Origen already implies the answer to this question in the very structure of his sevenfold 'scale of songs'. For, inasmuch as the sevenfold 'scale of songs' mirrors and signifies the underlying sevenfold structure of time itself—that is, as a textual re-presentation of the principial Week of Creation, ending with what D. J. Nodes calls the 'primordial first Sabbath'[34]—, the Song makes manifest the eschatological mystery of the seventh day.[35] In *Against Celsus*, Origen describes this perfect Sabbath day as:

[34] 'Allegory and Spiritual Observance in Origen's Discussions of the Sabbath', in Kannengieser and Petersen, 135.

[35] Nodes concurs that according to Origen's view of ultimate things, 'there is the eschatological Sabbath, that heavenly rest to follow the completion of the world' ('Allegory and Spiritual Observance', 131). Origen occasionally makes use of the Eighth Day (i.e. the Lord's Day) as an eschatological symbol, especially when he wishes to stress the obsolescence of the Jewish cultus and its fulfilment in the Lord's Resurrection (see *Jo* 2.198 (*SC* 120bis. 346): 'a rest that is after the Sabbath should have come into existence from the seventh day of our God'). Nonetheless, the Seventh Day remains the primary and determining eschatological symbol throughout Origen's whole corpus (see *Cels.* 6.61 (*SC* 147. 330–2); *Comm. ser. in Mt.* 45 (*GCS* 38. 90–3); *Comm. in Mt.* 12.36 (GCS 40.151–2); *Hom. in Num.* 23.4 (*GCS* 30. 215–17)), a fact that might reflect a certain dependence on Philo's portrayal of the Logos as the Hebdomad (*Opf.* 100 (*OPA* 1. 206–7); *Heres.* 216 (*OPA* 15. 270–2); *Spec. Leg.* 2.56–70 (*OPA* 24. 270–80)). On this possible connection between Philo and Origen, see R. M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition*, Brown Judaic Studies 69 (Chico, Calif., 1984), 42.

…the Sabbath day and rest of God which follows the completion of the world's creation and which lasts for the duration of the world, and on which all those will keep festival with God who have done all their works in their six days, and who because they have omitted none of their duties, will ascend to the contemplation and assembly of righteous and blessed things.[36]

Origen's understanding of this 'Sabbath day and rest of God' and his assessment of the Song coincide on three points. First, he invests God's Sabbath with the pre-eminently 'festal' character ('keep festival with God') that belongs likewise to the day on which the Bridegroom sings the Song. Second, he portrays the Sabbath as the day of ascent to beatific vision ('the contemplation…of righteous and blessed things'), a contemplative mode of being that the Song imparts fully as the enoptic science. Third and finally, this Sabbath possesses the finality of 'completion', in which the 'ascent' to ultimate things is brought to fulfilment.

Origen vividly portrays the Sabbath character of the Bride's 'ascent' to the heavenly mysteries in his image of her seven 'stately steps' to the *thalamum sponsi*. But he most clearly announces the eschatological nature of this destination as 'completion' or 'perfection' in his interpretation of the sequence of the three Solomonic books. As we noted above, Origen makes much of the hermeneutical value of the place-names 'Israel' and 'Jerusalem' in his serial reading of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, exactly, moreover, as he does (with greater or lesser emphasis) for each of the six 'introductory songs'. Coming to the Song, one would expect him to focus likewise on the Song's historical *topos*. In fact, he departs from this pattern, leading the reader to consider not the place but the moment, the *kairos*, in which Solomon sings the Song. He writes:

And when the perfection of all things has been achieved and the Bride, who has been perfected—in other words, the whole rational creation—is united with Him, because he has made peace through his blood, not only as to the things that are on earth, but also as to the things that are in heaven, then He is called Solomon only, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father, when he shall have brought to nought all principality and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet and death, the last enemy, is destroyed. Thus, when all things have been pacified

[36] *Cels.* 6.61 (*SC* 147. 330)

and subjected to the Father, and God is all in all, then He will be called Solomon and nothing else—that is, the Peaceable, only.[37]

Origen lays out future conditionals in rapid succession, each defining the *kairos* in which the Bridegroom shall be known as 'Solomon', the 'Peaceable', only (*Solomon tantummodo, id est solum pacificus, nominabitur*). These conditions are related to the finality of all being (*ad perfectionem omnium; omnis rationalis creatura*), and so are appropriately envisioned as eschatological events.

In the final analysis, what this text reveals is that Origen understands the Song to show forth for our contemplation and conformation the mystery developed controversially, in *On First Principles*, as the *apocatastasis*—the final 'consummation and restitution of all things' (*consummatio et restitutio*).[38] This real identity between the Song's *kairos* and the final 'consummation' becomes obvious when the language of the foregoing text is compared with that in which *On First Principles* describes the world's true finality. Five expressions invite comparison:

(1) *Cant.* 'when the perfection of all things has been achieved'

Princ. 'the end and consummation of all things',[39] 'the perfection of God's likeness was reserved for [humanity] at the consummation';[40]

(2) *Cant.* 'when . . . the Bride, who has been perfected—in other words, the whole rational creation—is united with Him'

Princ. '[souls], advancing and ascending little by little in due order and measure, [until] Christ the Lord, who is King

[37] 'Cum vero ad perfectionem omnium ventum fuerit et sponsa ei perfecta, omnis dumtaxat rationalis creatura, iungetur, quia pacificavit per sanguinem suum non solum quae in terris sunt, sed et quae in caelis, tunc Solomon tantummodo dicitur, cum tradiderit regnum Deo et Patri, cum evacuaverit omnem principatum et potestam. Oportet enim eum regnare, donec ponat inimicos suos sub pedibus suis et novissimus inimicus destruatur mors. Et ita pacificatis omnibus Patrique subiectis, cum erit iam Deus omnia in omnibus, Solomon tantummodo, id est solum pacificus, nominabitur', *Cant.* prol. 4.20 (*SC* 375. 160).

[38] *Princ.* 3.6.9 (*SC* 268. 252). Origen's most important discussions of the 'consummation' are found in *Princ.* 1.6–7 (*SC* 252. 194–220) and *Princ.* 3.6 (*SC* 268. 234–55). See H. Crouzel, 'L'apocatastase chez Origène', in *Origeniana Quarta* (1985), 282–90.

[39] 'finis et consummatio omnium', *Princ.* 3.6.1 (*SC* 268. 234).

[40] 'similitudinis vero ei perfectio in consummatione servata est', *Princ.* 3.6.1 (*SC* 268. 236).

of all, will himself take over the kingdom ... and will reign in them'[41]

(3) *Cant.* 'when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God'

Princ. '... until such time as he subjects them to the Father who subjected all things to him'[42]

(4) *Cant.* 'when he shall have brought to nought all principality and power; for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet and death, the last enemy, is destroyed'

Princ. 'It is on this account, moreover, that the last enemy, who is called death, is said to be destroyed; in order, namely, that there may be no longer any sadness when there is no death nor diversity when there is no enemy'[43]

(5) *Cant.* 'when all things have been pacified and subjected to the Father, and God is all in all (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 28)'

Princ. 'this condition ... in which God is said not only to be in all things but even to be all things',[44] 'or in other words, when they have been rendered capable of receiving God, then God will be to them 'all in all'[45]

These texts show that above all the 'consummation' or 'perfection of all things' signals the end of all 'variety and diversity' (*varietas et diversitas*) whatsoever.[46] For Origen, this final rectification of variety

[41] 'ut paulatim proficientes et ascendentes modo et ordine ... Christus dominus, qui est rex omnium, regnum ipse suscipiet ... regnans in eis', *Princ.* 3.6.9 (*SC* 268. 252–4). Compare the future celestial ascent in 'due order and measure' (*modo et ordine*) to the eschatological verities to the present textual ascent in 'due order and sequence' (*ordo consequentiaque*) through the six songs that comprise the Bride's 'stately steps', *Cant.* prol. 4.14 (*SC* 375. 156).

[42] '... tamdiu usquequo eos etiam patri subiciat qui sibi subdidit omnia', *Princ.* 3.6.9 (*SC* 268. 254).

[43] 'Propterea namque etiam novissimus inimicus, qui mors appellatur, destrui dicitur, ut neque ultra triste sit aliquid, ubi mors non est, neque diversum sit, ubi non est inimicus', *Princ.* 3.6.5 (*SC* 268. 244).

[44] 'quod perfectionem ... quod non solum in omnibus esse dicitur deus, sed etiam omnia esse dicitur deus', *Princ.* 3.6.2 (*SC* 268. 238–40).

[45] 'id est ut, cum capaces dei fuerint effecti, sit eis deus omnia in omnibus', *Princ.* 3.6.9 (*SC* 268. 254).

[46] *Princ.* 3.6.4 (*SC* 268. 244).

equates to the overcoming of all enmity among creatures themselves and between creatures and God—in a peace that is ontological and universal, comprehending every mode of being, corporeal, intellectual, and intelligible. According to Origen, then, the Song exemplifies this final state, inasmuch as it is the Song that reveals 'Solomon' alone as the 'Peaceable'.

For Origen, the great dignity, perfection, and power of the Song lies in the fact that it reveals and imparts the very agent of the 'consummation', namely the fire of divinizing *erôs*/*agapê*. For it is by 'participation in the divine fire' (*divini ignis participatione*)[47]—a 'participation' (*participatio*), moreover, that is proportionate to the soul's 'loving affection' (*dilectio*)[48]—that the rational creature enjoys the 'power of restoring itself to that condition of fervour in which it was at the beginning' (*facultas restituendi se in illum statum fervoris, in quo ex initio fuit*).[49] This restoration to the original state of being is, for Origen, the very character of the *apocatastasis*. Thus in the Song, this 'divine fire', infusing a body of *logoi* expressive of love, reveals its essentially intelligible character, originating in the single *logos* of the Bridegroom's creative and recreative epithalamium. For the Song not only depicts God (in his Logos) typologically as the 'All in all' but manifests him as the personal finality of all beings, made available in the eschatological *kairos* of the text.

The eschatological setting of the Song

Origen specifies for the Song both a superterrestrial or heavenly *topos* and a superhistorical or eschatological *kairos*. In other words, he merges the unique intelligibility of this book with the end of time and so with the conditions characteristic of the end of time. Vigorously stated, Origen finds the Song to be no less than the total eschatological mystery present to the reader as text.

Accordingly, Origen tends to elide *topos* and *kairos* in his two major descriptions of the Song's 'limiting' context. Whereas, for example, in his treatment of the 'scale of songs' we might expect him to emphasize the moment of the Song's disclosure, just as he has

47 *Princ.* 2.8.3 (*SC* 252. 346).
48 *Princ.* 2.6.3 (*SC* 252. 314).
49 *Princ.* 2.8.3 (*SC* 252. 346).

done in the case of the previous six songs, he instead points to the place of its singing. Likewise, in his treatment of Solomon's three books, where his reading of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes might lead us to anticipate a certain emphasis on the place from which Solomon wrote the Song, Origen instead invites us to contemplate the moment that is revealed in the Song. How, then, does the presence of an eschatological *topos* and *kairos* account for this striking example of *metalêpsis*?

In Origen's metaphysics, spaces and times are but epiphenomena of the 'variety and diversity' noted above, since they are both related to the measurement of beings-in-extension and their movements relative to one another.[50] Yet according to Origen the finality of all creatures, as we noted above, is that God—with God's unique attributes—shall 'not only . . . be in all things but even . . . be all things'. God, as the 'All in all', will really become once again the only cosmos in which creatures dwell:

> And he will be all things in each person in such a way that everything which the rational mind . . . can feel or understand or think will be all God and that the mind will no longer be conscious of anything besides or other than God, but will think God and see God and hold God and God will be the mode and measure of its every movement; and in this way God will be all to it.[51]

Inasmuch as times and places are objects of thought and understanding, they too must on principle be ordered towards the unqualified unity of God's future 'allness'. In God, who is personally the *telos* of all being, times and places converge in identity.

Therefore, Origen conceives of no real difference between the 'when' and the 'where' of what he calls the 'end and perfection of things'. The 'end'—like the end of a journey—is both a place and a time. Nevertheless, in its wayfaring state the human mind can conceive of this absolute 'end' only under these dual and diverse aspects. Hence, in the context of Origen's theology of the Song, the single reality of the 'end' may with equal correctness be named as 'place'

[50] See *Princ.* 2.1.3 (*SC* 252. 238–40).

[51] 'Per singulos autem omnia erit hoc modo, ut quidquid rationabilis mens . . . vel sentire vel intellegere vel cogitare potest, omnia deus sit nec ultra iam aliquid aliud nisi deum sentiat, deum cogitet, deum videat, deum teneat, mones motus sui deus sit; et ita erit ei omnia deus', *Princ.* 3.6.3 (*SC* 268. 240).

(e.g. House of God, Nuptial Chamber, Holy of Holies, New Jerusalem) or as 'time' (e.g. the end, the final advent, the consummation, fulfilment, the last day). This 'end', Origen tells us, is the only *kairos* that limits the text of the Song. Likewise, its only *topos* is the 'nuptial chamber' of God's life where the creature finds a perfect rest that is, with only seeming paradox, a perfect activity.

WHO IS 'SOLOMON'?: TYPE AND REALITY

The problem of Solomon's identity in Origen's Song of Songs exegesis

Origen presents the 'end of things' as the real and only setting of the Song, when it is read in the unity of its *logos*. He hears the Song as though it, as one *logos*, were uttered only from a 'place' (*topos*) and 'time' (*kairos*) that are entirely superhistorical and incorporeal. For Origen, this *topos* and this *kairos* are not present to the Song merely as the external circumstances of its disclosure. Rather, they bring into view the dimensions of the speaker's inner world—the precise form assumed by the speaker's intellect—at the time that the text is revealed.

In establishing the 'where' and the 'when' of the Song's presentation, then, Origen intends to lead his reader nearer to recognizing the true 'who' of the Song. That is to say, he leads us to consider the identity of the *logikos*, the saint (ὁ ἅγιος) in whom the *logos* of the Song subsists at its origin—namely, 'Solomon'. By determining the identity of this 'Solomon' in the Song and, further, by establishing the situation in which he sings, Origen intends to specify the organizing *logos* of the whole text.

As for any text of Scripture, the Song's speaker must be intellectually capable of bearing and sustaining the full reality of the text as subsistent *logos*. Only an intellect 'roomy' enough, as it were, to contain the extraordinary *topos* and *kairos* of the Song, as well as its intrinsic perfection, is fit to act as its speaker. Origen uses this rationale to transpose the context of recitation to an incorporeal, superhistorical order such that the heavenly Logos becomes, irreducibly, the only Bridegroom who stands at the metaphysical limits of the text.

Establishing the Logos-Bridegroom's special presence to the Song as its sole speaker—that is, its only originating *logikos*—requires no little dexterity from Origen. After all, the Song itself identifies 'Solomon' as its speaker/singer. What is, for Origen at least, a naive reading would conclude that in the simplest sense the text belongs to Solomon the king of Israel, prophet and son of David. Paradoxically, however, the special attributes of the Song as Origen has so far envisioned them preclude a simple equation of the historical Solomon with the textual 'Solomon' (i.e. the Bridegroom who sings the whole *logos* of the Song and who then plays the same role in the drama).

Origen does not exclude the historical Solomon from the Song in any absolute sense. Quite the contrary, he includes the person of Solomon maximally in the Song, a fact that we shall explore shortly. Nevertheless, he perceives the historical Solomon to be present to the 'whole body' of the Song only in, through and under the very special conditions that characterize its maximal, eschatological reality. But since the Song's *logos* is conceived and 'uttered' entirely from the Bridegroom-Logos' eternity—that is, since the Song is limited only by an eschatological *kairos* and *topos*—the historical Solomon must be divested of his historically conditioned way of being, at least to the extent that he participates in its revelation as its singer.

In so far as Solomon is inclined toward and conformed intellectually to sensible realities, to that extent he is incapable of a perfect union with the Logos' way of being. This perfect union is not only the saving doctrine of the Song but also, for Origen, the hermeneutical reality in which its textual *logos* inheres. Indeed, to the degree that Solomon remains even *to the reader's imagination* an historical and embodied personality, he belongs typologically only to the order of *history* and to his own preliminary books of instruction, the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Let us now look at the evidence that supports these claims.

Solomon as *typos* in the Song of Songs

Earlier, we observed that Origen establishes for Solomon a role as an historical-textual type of Christ in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. If Origen understands Solomon to 'sing' the Song under the figure of the

Bride, it is equally true that he will seek in Solomon a type of Christ as well: 'Solomon is in many respects a type of Christ.'[52] Appropriately, then, the *Commentary* and *Homilies* carry the identity of 'Solomon' through a wide range of readings, both literal and allegorical. Indeed, apart only from Christ, Solomon features more prominently than any other biblical character in the known sections of the *Commentary on the Song*, and Origen presents him both as an historical personality and an historical and narrative type of Christ. His name, Origen tells us, means 'the Peaceable', a fitting title for the divine Logos as the eternal Sabbath and eschatological 'peace' of souls.[53] As the 'son of David' (*filius David*) according to the flesh, Solomon bodies forth both Christ's historical and his spiritual lineage.[54] In conversing with Sheba, Solomon displays an alluring wisdom that prefigures the power of Christ's pedagogy to attract and unify the gentile Church through teaching.[55]

Yet, when Origen comes to consider Solomon's relation to the text of the Song as such, he develops a portrait of Solomon *qua* Solomon that shows him to lack precisely those qualities required for him to function typologically in the special milieu of the Song. In every typological reading, of course, some difference in the type will be either implied or underscored to secure the primacy of the exemplar. However, in the case of Solomon's role relative to the Song, the difference that Origen fixes between type and exemplar amounts nearly to an opposition in those matters most central to the meaning and reality of the Song as he understands them: spiritual *erôs* and desire, sensual delight in the spirit, nuptial union and fecundation in the heavenly order. By positing such a semiotic opposition between Solomon and the heavenly lovers in the order of nuptial *erôs*, Origen further distances the Song from the naive readings of the *simpliciores* and the reprobate interpretations of the carnal man. More crucially,

[52] 'In plurimis Solomonem typum Christi ferre . . .', *Cant.* prol. 4.17 (*SC* 375. 158).

[53] *Cant.* prol. 4.17–20 (*SC* 375. 158–60): 'Et ita pacificatis omnibus Patrique subiectis, cum erit iam Deus omnia in omnibus, Solomon tantummodo, id est solum pacificus, nominabitur'; as type of the 'true Peace-Lover, our Lord Jesus Christ' (*verus pacificus Dominus nostri Iesu Christus*), who reigned in 'Jerusalem . . . the Vision of Peace' (*Hierusalem, visio pacis*), see *Cant.* 2.1.26–28 (*SC* 375. 275–6). The etymology is also found in Philo, *De congr. quaer. erud.* 177 (*OPA* 16. 226–8).

[54] *Cant.* prol. 4.18 (*SC* 375. 158); *Hom. in Lc.* 28:2–3 (*SC* 87. 352–4).

[55] *Cant.* prol. 4.18 (*SC* 375. 158); 2.1.28–30 (*SC* 375. 276–8).

he makes it very difficult, without breaking the coherence of types, to attribute the text itself, as *logos* and 'whole body', to the mind or the circumstances of the historical Solomon.

We can see this opposition developed in the following passage from Book 3 of the *Commentary on the Song*, where Origen sets Solomon's impurity in stark relief against Christ's perfection as 'Flower of the field and Lily of the valleys' (Song 2: 1):

> The Bridegroom, then, becomes the Lily in this valley, in that the heavenly Father clothed Him with such a robe of flesh as never Solomon in all his glory had power to possess. For Solomon's flesh was not born spotless, without man's desire or woman's intercourse with man; nor was it innocent of any subsequent offence.[56]

Between the historical Solomon and the Bridegroom, Origen posits a notable contrast in the orders of both being and act. The Bridegroom-Logos is the true 'Lily of the Valley' clothed, as Solomon never was, in morally untainted flesh and in unadulterated purity. By contrast, Solomon's flesh was conceived, like that of all humans apart from Jesus, with the deeply penetrating taint of concupiscence.[57]

More significantly, Solomon bears the guilt of 'subsequent offence'. Thematic markers in the passage—'flesh' (*caro*), 'not . . . spotless' (*non . . . immaculatum*), 'man's concupiscence' (*concupiscentia viri*), 'woman's intercourse' (*concubitu mulieris*)—make it clear that by 'subsequent offence', Origen means Solomon's notorious sexual and cultic transgressions. Specifically, Origen alludes to Solomon's marriages to foreign wives and subsequent acceptance of their alien worship (1 Kings 11: 1–4), a fact confirmed just a few lines later in the same section by his interpretation of Song 2: 2 : 'as the lily among the thorns, so is my neighbour among the daughters'.[58] The 'thorns'

[56] 'Fit ergo lilium in hac convalle sponsus in eo quod vestivit eum Pater caelestis tali indumento carnis quale nec Solomon in omni gloria sua habere potuit. Non enim habuit Solomon absque concupiscentia viri concubitu mulieris immaculatam et nulli prorsus peccato obnoxiam carnem', *Cant.* 3.4.3 (*SC* 376. 516–18).

[57] Origen alludes here to the virginal conception of Jesus, to which he attributes the absence of concupiscence—inordinate desire—in Jesus' flesh. See *Comm. in Rom.* fr. 45 (1.8), *JTS* 14 (1912–13), where Rom. 8: 13 figures in Origen's argument that Jesus did not possess 'sinful flesh' but rather 'the likeness of sinful flesh'.

[58] NRSV: 'As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens.'

(*spinae*) that vex the Bride, Origen writes, are 'daughters' (*filiae*), that is, heretics (*haeretici*) who 'all began by believing, and afterwards depart from the road of faith and the truth of the Church's teaching'.[59] Likewise, Solomon began well but, as 1 Kings 11: 4 records, 'when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God'. Origen clearly refers to this offence in *Homily 28 on Luke*, where he teaches that the Lord 'took on the person of sinners and depraved men. He willed to be born from the stock of Solomon, whose sins have been recorded (*et nasci voluit de stirpe Salomonis, cuius peccata conscripta sunt*) ...'[60] Thus, the faithless daughters' choice to 'depart' (*declino*) presents Origen's reader with an obvious parallel to Solomon's having 'turned away'; and so we find the pattern of spiritual adultery seen in Song 2: 2 instantiated in the life of the earthly, fleshly Solomon.

Origen's specific aim in this passage from Book 3 is to secure against a somatic reading any inclusion whatsoever of the historical Solomon, as a bridegroom and lover, in the nuptial *fabula* so compellingly recounted in the Song. Unlike the historical Solomon, the heavenly Bride does not prostitute her affections like one of the Song's 'daughters'. Nor does the divine Bridegroom divide his attentions amongst many lovers; for his 'perfect dove'—his Bride—'is but one' (*Una sit perfecta columba*).[61] For Origen, then, the coincidence in both the diachronic and narrative histories of Solomon's multiple marriages, his inordinate desire, and cultic infidelity preclude him from typifying Bride or Bridegroom. In fact, his actions speak more pointedly of the primal fall from created integrity, a fall which Origen elsewhere roots in the primordial Bride's adultery, her failure of *erôs* for her divine Spouse, and her lust for her own private, sensible fantasies.

'Solomon' as hermeneutical *skandalon*

The same typological contrariety that Origen posits between Solomon the king and 'Solomon' the Bridegroom in this one verse of the

[59] *Cant.* 3.4.6 (*SC* 376. 518).

[60] *Hom. in Lc.* 28.3 (*SC* 87. 354), tr. Lienhard, 116.

[61] *Cant.* prol. 4.4 (*SC* 375. 148); see Song 6: 9—'My dove, my perfect one, is the only one ...'

Song must apply equally to the whole text of the Song. Much as the Song's nuptial drama becomes a 'stumbling-block' for the reader if it is read somatically, thereby forcing a total reading at a spiritual level, so do the historical Solomon's erotic/nuptial foibles compel the reader to conceive of the Song's 'Solomon' at a higher level. And, since the 'Solomon' is in view as author and speaker of the text as 'whole body', the whole text itself must on Origen's view be conditioned hermeneutically by his particular mode of being. Consequently, the exclusion of the historical Solomon from the text must be projected outwards towards its outermost 'limits', to encompass the eschatological nuptial setting wherein the Bridegroom presents the Song itself as his marriage-song.

In effect, Origen construes the name 'Solomon' of the Song's title as a hermeneutical *skandalon*. It is no accident, therefore, that when Origen rounds out his discussion of 'Solomon's' identity in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, he strongly implies a disjunction between the historical Solomon and the nuptial Solomon of the Song. In the passage that follows, Origen reveals his interest in the same issues raised when he discusses Solomon's impropriety both as *erastês* and *typos*. The aim of this passage is to dissociate the Bride and Bridegroom—who meet as the Bride completes her bridal procession through the 'week of songs'—from the figure of the historical Solomon.

Fittingly, therefore, and for the same reason as before, we find in this little book that was to be written about the love of the Bridegroom and the Bride, neither 'Son of David,' nor 'king', nor any others that can pertain to a bodily understanding; thus the Bride now perfected may say of Him with reason: 'And if we have known Christ after the flesh for a while, but now we know Him so no longer' [2 Cor. 5: 16], let no one think that she loves anything belonging to the body or pertaining to the flesh, and let no stain be thought of in connection with her love. So the Song is simply Solomon's; it belongs neither to the Son of David, nor to Israel's king, and there is absolutely no indication of a carnal denomination in it.[62]

[62] 'Competenter ergo in hoc libello, qui de amore sponsi et sponsae erat scribendus, etiam pro hoc neque filius David neque rex neque aliud horum quod ad corporeum pertinere possit intellectum scribitur, ut merito de eo perfecta iam sponsa dicat quia: Etsi cognovimus aliquando Christum secundum carnem, sed nunc iam non novimus, ne quis eam putet corporeum aliquid amare aut in carne positum, et

The historical Solomon cannot typify the Bride. The 'stainless' love of the Bride contrasts with the imperfect love of Solomon, who 'was not born spotless', and, indeed, who fell into 'subsequent offence' precisely because of his concupiscence. More significantly, however, the historical Solomon is simply not the Bridegroom. For his imperfect 'flesh', so far inferior to the Incarnate Word's, cannot be the object of the Bride's desire, since she does not 'love anything belonging to the body or pertaining to the flesh' (*corporeum aliquid amare aut in carne positum*). But the Bride desires more intensely than any other creature. Since the object of her desire, as she attains the Song, is the Bridegroom, the historical Solomon cannot be her Beloved, whose Song is the very power that draws her forward to nuptial consummation.

Similarly, the Bride-reader, progressing along the *via canticorum,* is not drawn at all to a bodily bridegroom (i.e. Solomon the king) out of fleshly desire but only to the divine Spouse out of spiritual desire. In the Song, then, the Bride (as reader) no longer encounters Christ 'after the flesh' (*secundum carnem*) but, now, only after the spirit. Origen, of course, has integrated moral and even biological senses into the meaning of 'flesh' here. But more significant for his reading of the whole Song is the related hermeneutical use to which he puts it, 'flesh' denoting the quality of understanding conveyed through names, terms, and words (i.e. *logoi*) that signify corporeal or carnal beings.

At one level, then, this passage merely reformulates Origen's commitment to the hermeneutic of incorporeality that typifies his exegesis of the Song as drama. Thus the Song excludes thematic 'bodiliness', in that the nuptial tale does not concern anything 'corporeal' (*corporeus*) or 'carnal' (*carnalis*), including physical love and marriage. And more significantly, Origen affirms the verbal incorporeality of the Song as well. The Song incorporates no terms having corporeal meaning (*corporeus intellectus*) nor any names with 'fleshly' sense (*carnalis nomen*). In short, Origen proposes in this passage that

macula aliqua amori eius credatur induci. Propterea ergo Canticum Canticorum Solomoni tantummodeo est, et neque filio David neque regi Istrahel, neque aliqua prorsus in his miscetur carnalis nominis intelligentia', *Cant.* prol. 4.21 (*SC* 375. 160–2); Lawson, 52–3 (emended).

'absolutely' (*prorsus*) no words, phrases, or expressions in the Song signify sensible beings or temporal events.

What Origen has in view is the character of *logos* and *logoi*—defined in the broad sense discussed earlier—as they present themselves in the Song. None of the *logoi* of the Song, he asserts, possess *sôma* or *sarx*. His assertion is unequivocal, and it bears upon the reading of the whole text. Thus his statements must lead the reader up from the Song's 'lower register' (drama) to its 'upper register' (epithalamium), where 'Solomon' is perceived to utter the Song's whole *logos*. For, the *logoi* that come under special consideration in this passage are precisely those that identify Solomon as the source of the Song, and so of its purpose and its unity as an 'epithalamium . . . in the form of a drama'.

In other words, Origen argues that the hermeneutical qualification of absolute 'bodilessness' must also be understood to apply to the name (*nomen*) 'Solomon', which appears in the opening verse of the text. It is on this basis that Origen contrasts the somatic bearing of Solomon's names in Proverbs ('neither "Son of David" '; 'belongs . . . neither to the "Son of David" ') and Ecclesiastes ('nor king'; 'nor to Israel's king') with the Song's thoroughgoing exclusion of any corporeal sense from the name 'Solomon' ('nor any others that can pertain to a corporeal understanding'; 'The Song is simply Solomon's . . . and there is absolutely no indication of a carnal denomination in it'). Origen could scarcely have found plainer language to deny the identity of the historical Solomon with the one whom the Song identifies as its speaker or, rather, the One who identifies himself as the singer, presenter, and author of the text.

The Song of Songs as uniquely proper to the divine 'Solomon'-Christ

Origen's perception of 'Solomon' in relation to the Song has the most profound implications for his theological judgement of the whole text. Solomon, the historical king and prophet, is not in the strictest sense the one named when the text says, 'The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's'. The Song is neither the property of the prophet Solomon nor proper to him. This means, in terms of the metaphysical

structure of the text, that the *logikos* of the historical Solomon is not present to the Song in any ordinary sense as its informing intelligence.

Consequently, Origen's way of describing the Song's origin in the advent of the Logos requires us to hear the Logos as the *sole* singer of the *whole* text. The 'Solomon' of the Song, not only the dramatic player but also and more emphatically the singer of the epithalamium, is in every sense the divine Bridegroom and Logos. The divine Logos is present to the Song, and so to its reader and listener, with unqualified immediacy under the aspect of heavenly Spouse and Lover. 'Solomon' in the title verse simply names the Bridegroom-Logos under his aspect as the 'Peaceable One', that is, as the Lord of the sabbath rest. When reading the Song, as epithalamium, in its spiritual sense—*which is the only sense it carries*—the Christian does not hear the voice of the historical Solomon at all. In the Song, one hears only the voice of the Bridegroom, now come and present in a specifically textual advent.

WHERE IS SOLOMON THE PROPHET?: THE SONG OF SONGS, HISTORY AND THE HISTORICAL SOLOMON

Solomon and the integrity of the prophetic event

Does Origen's perspective completely erase Solomon, the human prophet, from the Song? If this were Origen's intention, he would be trapped in an absurdity so extreme that we cannot imagine him failing to notice it. For, without some mode of human mediation, it would be impossible to explain the Song's original disclosure, its historical transmission as a text, or the openness of its spiritual sense to the reader's participation.

To gauge the seeming anomaly involved in Origen's 'high doctrine' of Solomonic authorship, we must consider what a premium he places on the historical prophet's integrity of mind and will in his (or her) role as mediator of the Word. For example, he holds that God works in the prophets 'in such a way that it rest[s] with the man's own will and judgement whether or not he [is] willing to follow God's call to the heavenly and divine' (... *ut maneret in*

arbitrio hominis ac iudicio, si sequi velit aut nolit ad caelestia et divina provocantem) and so, that in prophesying, the speaker 'suffers no mental disturbance or aberration whatsoever as a result of the immediate inspiration and does not lose the free judgement of the will' (... *nullam prorsus ex imminenti adspiratione obturbationem vel alienationem mentis incurrat nec perdat arbitrii sui iudicium liberum*).[63] In fact, it is the prophet's cooperative activity in the event of revelation that distinguishes divine inspiration from demonic possession.[64] The Holy Spirit's agents are present, not 'out of their minds' (ἐξιστάμενοι) in any sense.[65]

Origen, then, is theologically invested in the prophet's presence to the whole event—to God, to history, to the text—in which Scripture is inspired. Origen understands this presence, as we shall see momentarily, to remain immanent as a living dimension of the text itself and an essential datum of exegesis. It is here that the scriptural book is nearest its own point of origin, where God has met the prophet in his own historical and corporeal particularity. In the case of the Song, however, Origen fully assimilates 'Solomon', the speaker named by the Song, to the identity of the Bridegroom-Logos ('Solomon the Peaceable One'). In turn, he perceives all historicity and corporeal/sensible conceptions whatsoever—and, thus, all hermeneutical *sôma*—to be absent from the text, no matter from which vantage point one contemplates it—whether 'lower register' or 'upper register'.

The prophet Solomon and the paradox of origins in the Song of Songs

Origen is fully aware that the Song was not lowered from heaven on a golden tether. Solomon the king and prophet, Origen affirms, is the real, historical writer of the Song. For example, he identifies Solomon as the prophet 'who served the will of Holy Spirit in these three

63 *Princ.* 3.3.4 (*SC* 268. 194). On this passage, see A. Zöllig, *Die Inspirationslehre des Origenes*, Strassburger theologischen Studien 5,1 (Berlin, 1902), 69 ff.

64 *Princ.* 3.3.3 (*SC* 268. 188–90).

65 *Hom. in Ez.* 6.1 (*GCS* 33. 378): 'neque enim, ut quidam suspicantur, mente excedebant prophetae'.

books', which of course include the Song.[66] Again, referring to 1 Kings 4: 29–32, Origen argues that by the title 'Song of Songs', the historical Solomon has not merely 'signalized this one song among his many songs'.[67] Rather, its title signifies the text's absolute perfection, in respect of all songs whatsoever, including those others that Solomon himself also penned. Finally, Origen simply and plainly affirms that Solomon wrote the Song:

> It seems to me that this little book is an epithalamium, that is to say, a marriage-song, which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama and sang under the figure of the Bride, about to wed, and burning with heavenly love towards her Bridegroom, who is the Word of God.[68]

That these are Origen's opening words in the *Commentary* shows the high premium that he places on preserving the prophet's role in the Song intact. Yet, it is equally true that these words also illuminate the paradox of origins that, on Origen's reading, necessarily qualifies the relationship of Solomon the king, as prophet, to 'Solomon' the heavenly Bridegroom, as the true author and speaker of the Song.

This paradox is visible in the dual role that Origen defines for Solomon in the Song's transmission. On the one hand, Solomon 'wrote' (a *Solomone conscriptus*) the Song (i.e. the text as a whole) as an epithalamium, giving it the form of a drama. On the other hand, Solomon 'sang under the figure of the Bride' (*cecinit instar... sponsae*). One reading of Origen's words is, of course, that the prophet Solomon's activity was primarily that of conversing, lovingly, with the inspiring Logos, all the while recording both the Bridegroom's love-speech and his own responses.

On this reading, Origen would hear Solomon-the-Bride say, 'Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions?' (Song 1: 7). The Bridegroom-Logos answers Solomon, 'If you do not know, O fairest

[66] *Cant.* prol. 4.15 (*SC* 375. 156).

[67] *Cant.* prol. 4.31 (*SC* 375. 166). This is a reference to Solomon's five-thousand (according to LXX; one thousand and five according to the Masoretic) songs, mentioned in 1 Kings 4: 32.

[68] 'Epithalamium libellus hic, id est nuptiale carmen, dramatis in modum mihi videtur a Solomone conscriptus, quem cecinit instar nubentis sponsae et erga sponsum suum, qui est Sermo Dei, caelesti amore flagrantis', *Cant.* prol. 1.1 (*SC* 375. 80).

among women, follow the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents' (Song 1: 8). Yet Solomon as prophet and author sets the whole exchange down on paper. According to this reading, then, Solomon actively plays the role of the Bride, participating in the Song's nuptial drama even as he commits it all to writing.

Here, the difference between Solomon the prophet and Christ-Solomon resembles the common distinction that the late medieval allegorists made between 'Solomon' the prophet and Christ or the Holy Spirit, identified mystically in the title 'Song of Songs' itself.[69] For example, Honorius Augustodunensis (12th cent.) postulated a distinction between *scriptor* and *auctor* in his *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum*; the writer (*scriptor*), for Honorius is Solomon, who functions as an amanuensis, while the real author (*auctor*) is the Holy Spirit.[70] The comparison to Origen, of course, is not exact since Origen's *auctor* is the Bridegroom-Logos, though not so as to exclude the operation of the Holy Spirit.[71] Nevertheless, the similarity at this level is apparent enough.

This interpretation is entirely legitimate, as far as it goes. Indeed, Origen undoubtedly intends this as an appropriate 'lower register' reading. Yet, we must not forget that, according to Origen's hermeneutic, the 'whole body' of the Song itself possesses a unity of *logos* that flows from the Logos himself. And, at the same time, it is Solomon the prophet whose activity comprehends that *logos*, in its totality and unity, even as he writes the Song under the Bridegroom's instruction. In this respect, the prophet Solomon indeed acts wholly in the person of the Bridegroom.

Therefore, even though the opening of the Prologue identifies Solomon's activity as that of singing in the Bride's role, the tendency of Origen's thought leads us to see that Solomon just as completely sings the Song as the Bridegroom. Origen, in fact, advances this notion explicitly. In the penultimate sentence of the Prologue, he

[69] See A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1984), 132.

[70] *PL* 172: 347D–348C; example cited in Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved,* 60.

[71] e.g. Solomon 'served the will of the Holy Spirit' in his three books; *Cant.* prol. 4.15 (*SC* 375. 156).

explains that Solomon sings the Song *in persona Sponsi*: 'But now his saying "that is Solomon's" shows that this Song, which we have in hand and which he was about to sing, is Solomon's, and for that reason has the title that he gave to it.'[72] We see, then, that Origen has bracketed the whole Prologue with reflections on Solomon's role *vis-à-vis* the text of the Song itself. Not only does this fact argue that Rufinus has steered a tight course in rendering the shape of Origen's text. It also suggests that fully expanding upon the meaning of Solomon's name in the title so as to reveal his real identity and place in the text is perhaps Origen's central project in the Prologue.

Again, in the passage above, Origen stresses the identity of the text of the Song itself ('this Song which we have in hand'; *quod est in manibus*) with the divine marriage-song 'that is Solomon's' (*quod est Solomoni*; i.e. Christ's). But, unlike the parallel passage that opens the Prologue, it traces the source of the whole Song, with all its virtualities, to the 'singing' of the prophet Solomon. Every word of the text is perceived, at this point, to issue from the person of the prophet.

In the final analysis, every word of the Song, therefore, belongs fully to the Bridegroom-Logos who reveals and fully to Solomon who receives. The historical Solomon and Solomon the Bridegroom are seen really to converge in the One whom the title names 'Solomon'. Correspondingly, Origen implies that the historical act of prophesying and the divine act of revealing—acts whereby the Song comes to be—are really but one act performed by this one 'Solomon'. That moment in which Solomon stands 'about to sing' (*quod erat ei canendum*) the very text of the Song 'which we have in hand' is, therefore, the same Moment in which the Logos readies himself with his own Song, 'about to take his Bride' (*sponso sponsam suam suscepturo epithalamii specie erat canendum*).[73]

[72] 'Nunc autem, quia dixit: "quod est Solomoni", ostendit istud Canticum, quod est in manibus et quod erat ei canendum, hoc esse Solomonis et de hoc attitulationem, quam proposuit continere', *Cant.* prol. 4.35 (*SC* 376. 172).

[73] *Cant.* prol. 4.3 (*SC* 375. 148); notice the use of 'erat canendum' in both these phrases.

Solomon as transformed participant in the Bridegroom's 'Solomonic' identity

In fact, as Origen concludes his exposition of the name 'Solomon', he quite clearly affirms this absolute and real identity of the created Solomon with his eternal Lord, King, and Spouse. It should be held in mind that Origen applies these epithets to 'Solomon' understood as the author and speaker of the Song as a whole. They do not apply specifically to the Bridegroom as he appears and departs throughout the acts of the Song's 'lower register' drama. In the following passage, definitive for our study, Origen writes:

> And the fact that in the Song of Songs, where now perfection is shown forth (*in Cantico Canticorum, ubi iam perfectio ostenditur*), he decribes himself neither as son of David, nor as king, enables us to say further that, since the servant has been made the lord, and the disciple as the master, the servant obviously is such no longer: he has become as the Lord (*videtur iam neque servus esse servus, factus videlicet sicut Dominus*). Neither does the disciple figure as a disciple when he has been made as the master; rather, the sometime disciple is in truth as the master now, and the sometime servant as the lord. This line of thought may be applied also to the case of the king and those over whom he reigns, when the kingdom will be delivered up to God and the Father (*simili igitur ratione etiam de rege et his in quos regnat, adverti posse videbitur, cum regnum iam tradetur Deo et Patri*).[74]

Here, Origen contemplates no diminishment but, rather, the greatest conceivable intensification of Solomon's presence and activity in the Song. It is the prophet Solomon who identifies himself in progressively more refined ways—as 'son of David' and 'king'—at the beginnings of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. More than this, however, Origen tells us that it is Solomon who in the revelation of his three books has undergone a process of becoming, of being 'made' (*factus*) and remade in progressively more ennobled forms. This 'becoming' tends towards the perfection of Solomon's own being, in which 'becoming' and change are no longer necessary. Thus, having 'become' perfect, Solomon enters the intellectual and spiritual rest of the Bridegroom's wedding-chamber. Solomon's own

[74] *Cant.* prol. 4.28 (*SC* 375. 166).

'perfection'—which is also eschatological 'rest' in a simple union with the Logos—is the same as that perfection which 'now' is 'shown forth' in the Song.

Let us look more closely at Origen's conception of the way that Solomon 'becomes'. In advancing from one mode of prophecy to the next, Origen maintains, Solomon has changed. Thus, in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes the reader encounters Solomon in ever-increasing likeness to the Bridegroom, here named as Lord and King. And, in these books, Solomon appears spiritually as 'servant' (*servus*), 'disciple' (*discipulus*) and subject, even while he is, historically and corporeally, the 'king' and 'son of David'.

Arriving finally at the Song, however, the reader discovers that Solomon has finished with 'becoming'. He now enters the 'perfection now shown forth' (*iam perfectio ostenditur*) in the Song. Though he advances to the Song—and receives it—as Bride, in that very process of advancing and receiving he finds himself conformed entirely to the being of the Bridegroom.[75] Hence, in hearing the Song—which now we receive in the form of the inspired text—Solomon achieves total and unqualified identity with the Bridegroom. As a consequence, the prophet is no longer 'servant', 'disciple', or subject. In prophesying the Song, he is now 'Lord', 'Master', and 'King'. In summary, the prophet's personal *logos* has, in the Song, found itself elevated and conformed to the divine Logos who speaks and, more fundamentally, who *is* the Song—the comprehensive *logos/logikos* in-forming the body of the text.

In this way, Origen elevates Solomon (the prophet, the king, the Logos—there is no difference now) to the highest register of being. The negation whereby Solomon, the servant, 'is such no longer' (*iam neque esse*) proves to be the greatest affirmation of the historical Solomon himself: 'he has become as the Lord' (*factus sicut Dominus*). But it is an affirmation of Solomon in so far as he is restored to his

[75] More fundamentally, it is the Bridegroom who advances in Solomon. Thus, Origen writes, 'And let it not surprise you, seeing that Our Lord and Saviour is One and the Same, that we should speak of Him first as a beginner in Proverbs; then as advancing, in Ecclesiastes; and lastly as more perfect in the Song of Songs, when you see the same things written in the Gospels where He is said, for us and among us, to advance. "Jesus advanced", it is written, "in age and wisdom with God and men" ', *Cant.* prol. 4.22 (*SC* 375. 162).

original likeness to the divine Bridegroom, King, Lover, and Logos. And here, in the One who is the finality of all creatures, the limiting attributions of historical being can no longer apply, either to Solomon or to any other who follow in his way.

To summarize: Origen has made the prophet Solomon the agent by whom the Bridegroom is revealed as the sole singer of the epithalamium. The prophet Solomon participates fully in the production of this love-speech, which constitutes the whole *logos/Logos* of the Song. As the one who participates maximally in the Bridegroom's speaking, then, Solomon is maximally the Bride. And, since it is the Bridegroom's active, creative speech in which he shares, Solomon is also maximally the Bridegroom. His mode of participation is, to Origen's mind, so complete that it is really only correct to speak of a perfect identity between Solomon the prophet and 'Solomon the Peaceable One'.

Solomon's transformation into the Bridegroom

We must emphasize that Origen understands Solomon's transformation into the Peaceable One, while uttering the text of the Song, to have involved a real change in the being of Solomon himself. Origen does not envision a change merely on the order of language, such that it is only the name 'Solomon' that requires a spiritual interpretation. He does not, in other words, discern any equivocity whatsoever in the name 'Solomon' as it appears in the title verse.

Origen's opinion represents an important point of divergence from what was to become the standard allegorization of Solomon's name. For example, Honorius, whom we mentioned above, proposes that 'the author [i.e. "Solomon"] is *aequivocum*. For *aequivocum* is a thing that is one in writing, but diverse in meaning, as "lion" '.[76] Honorius, then, understands the name 'Solomon' to point to two different referents—the historical Solomon as *scriptor* and the heavenly Solomon as *auctor*. But Origen, on the contrary, maintains the univocity of 'Solomon', a univocity of meaning grounded in a perfect

[76] 'Aequivocum autem dicitur quod unum est in litteratura, sed diversum in significatione, ut leo', *PL* 172:348D; cited in Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, 61.

unity of existence. Thus, the name points to one Subject who has included and transformed the historical Solomon in his divine life.

These conclusions about Origen's construal of the Song's authorship are mandated by his explicit statements in the great *Commentary*. But they are also supported by the fact that he invokes an ontology of participation to reconcile the hermeneutical import of the Song's title verse with the reality of its prophetic authorship. By placing the transmission of the Song on an ontological footing, he indicates that he imagines a transformation to have truly occurred, as it were, in—or through and beyond—'space' and 'time'.

But, inasmuch as Solomon is also really taken up into the Bridegroom's eternity, this transformation must also sustain a supertemporal and superhistorical dimension. Fittingly, then, Origen writes:

> . . . but the same Paul calls this Bridegroom, to whom the Bride now hastens, the High Priest, and writes of Him not as being in heaven, but as passing into and beyond all the heavens (*non in caelis sit, sed penetrarit et pertransierit omnes caelos*); whither also His perfected Bride follows Him (*et illuc quoque eum haec sua perfecta sponsa sectetur*); cleaving to Him and joined to Him, she has ascended thither, for she has been made one spirit with Him (*immo illuc adhaerens ei et coniuncta conscenderit; est enim facta cum eo unus spiritus*).[77]

The divine Bridegroom, embracing his Bride, so fully includes her in his own life and being that their joint activity is utterly indivisible into parts. Origen, of course, conceives of this mutual ascent as including the perfected Bride wherever she is found. But what remains essential for Origen's exegesis of the Song is that, in the prophetic event, Solomon has really entered this very same perfection. Indeed, only Solomon's real transformation into the perfect Bride could, Origen reasons, make possible the transmission of this Song as the Bridegroom's very own marriage-song.

Exactly how Origen would imagine the prophet Solomon's state of being at the limits of the Song is impossible to determine, since he does not bring this matter explicitly into our line of sight in the *Commentary* or *Homilies*. Nor should we have expected him to do so. For his driving interest in the Prologue is to reveal Christ, the Bridegroom, as the sole singer of this purely spiritual epithalamium.

[77] *Cant.* prol. 4.23 (*SC* 375. 162).

Nevertheless, since Christ and Solomon really share a oneness of identity in the Song, Origen cannot separate Christ's state of being at the 'upper register' of the Song from that of the prophet Solomon. To seek Christ, in other words, is to find Solomon himself perfected through the mystery of prophetic union with the Logos.

Solomon and the Song of Songs: the summit of prophetic experience

As we have earlier observed, Origen holds to a high doctrine of prophecy, grounding the revelatory event in a union between the Logos and the prophet. His conception of prophecy cannot be adequately explained only as an epiphenomenon of his high soteriological valuation either of 'clear mental vision'[78] or of free will, and so of the prophet's fully knowing and freely willing share in the Logos' inspiration, even if the defence of free will is a high priority in Origen's doctrine of prophecy.[79] A more comprehensive view of the issue must incorporate both free will and prophecy together as dimensions of Origen's larger concern for the salvation and glorification of the whole rational being, spirit and body.[80] As we shall see, the *βίος προφητικός*—one of Origen's common names for the holy life of the prophets[81]—embraces every aspect of the prophet's life (i.e. *bios*), even the corporeal, shepherding it towards its complete transformation in the divine life.

Origen sees in prophecy as such only a particular instance in the human order of the whole process of salvation that is writ large in history and cosmos. Prophecy is a particular realization of the Son's

[78] See R. J. Hauck, *The More Divine Proof: Prophecy and Inspiration in Celsus and Origen*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series 69 (Atlanta, 1989), 105–35; expression taken from *Cels.* 7.4 in H. Chadwick's translation.

[79] See G. af Hällstrom, *Charismatic Succession: A Study on Origen's Concept of Prophecy*, Publications of the Finish Exegetical Society 42 (Helsinki, 1985), 16–25.

[80] R. Lyman establishes the soteriological context of Origen's doctrine of free will (*προαίρεσις*), showing that, for Origen, free will not only safeguards God's non-coercive, just, and good providence but also guarantees the rational creature's access to a share or participation in God's life, according to a real and not merely pre-ordained moral activity; see *Christology and Cosmology*, 58–69.

[81] *Cels.* 7.30 (*SC* 150. 82): *οἱ συγγενῶς τοῖς προφήταις καὶ ἐνθέως βιώσαντες*; *Comm. in Mt.* 10.18 (*GCS* 40. 25): *ὁ ζηλῶν βίον προφητικόν*.

eternal procession, identified by Origen with the advent ('coming into the world') of the Logos in John 1: 9.[82] Through this one advent, prophets formerly and all Christians now share in a 'return' to the beginning of all things:

It must however be recognized that at earlier times also there was an advent (ὅτι καὶ πρότερον ἐπεδήμει), albeit not in bodily form (μὴ σωματικῶς), in each of the saints (ἐν ἑκάστῳ τῶν ἁγίων). Also, after that visible advent (τὴν ἐπιδημίαν . . . τὴν βλεπομένην) of his, there is a further advent in us. And this too we should recognize, that for each of those who can most profit by it there is an advent of the Word (πρὸς ἕκαστον ἐπιδημία ἐστὶν τοῦ λόγοῦ). For what am I the better, if there has been an advent of the Word in the world, but I do not receive him? And on the other hand, though there has been as yet no advent in the whole world, but you allow that I share the experience of the prophets (δὸς δέ με γεγονέναι κατὰ τοὺς προφήτας), then I have the Word (ἐγὼ ἔχω τὸν λόγον).[83]

Thus, Origen tells us, the experiences of prophets and Christians are alike the one experience of salvation; and an 'advent in the whole world' will happen through the transmission of this prophetic reality, now known as gospel.[84]

Origen expresses this cosmological vision pointedly in his exegesis of the sabbatic 'peace' that the infant Jesus brought to Simeon, an archetype of all the prophets. Thus in *Homily 15 on Luke*, Origen comments on Simeon's exclamation, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word . . .' (Luke 2: 29):

Who is the one who departs in peace from this world (*quis est, qui de saeculo isto recedit in pace*) if not he who understands that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself' (*Deus erat in Christo mundum reconcilians sibi*—2 Cor. 5: 19)? Who if not he in whom nothing is hostile to God or opposed to him, but who by good works has acquired all peace and harmony in himself (*omnem pacem atque concordiam*)? Thus he is dismissed 'in peace'

[82] See *Hom. in Jer.* 9 (*SC* 232. 376–95).

[83] *Hom. in Jer.* 9.1 (*SC* 232. 376–8).

[84] A further important implication of this text is that, in the Christian economy, the baptized believer shares in the charism of the prophets; this charism is realized not only in holiness (see *Cels.* 7.30 (*SC* 150. 80–2)) but also in the allegorical reading of Scripture, an activity that proves the reader to possess what Origen calls a 'prophetic soul' (*prophetica mens*; see hom. Lev. 13.1). For a more complete discussion of Origen's views on the prophetic character of Christian experience, see G. af Hällström, *Charismatic Succession*, 4–9, 31–4, 42–56.

(*sic in pace dimittitur*) to go on to the holy fathers, to whom Abraham also went forth.[85]

The prophet's 'departure' into the *pax Christi* is not so much a flight from the world as a concrete expression of the whole world's reconciliation (i.e. peace-making), presently being wrought by Christ. Origen completes this thought in a Greek fragment from the same homily: 'For the one who would bring peace to the world was at hand, who unites heaven with earth, who prepares earth to become heaven by the teaching of the gospel.'[86] The prophet, then, anticipates in his own being and experience the same salvation promised to all beings universally. And, in the prophet's writings, one above all perceives and then realizes in oneself (cf. above: 'I share the experience of the prophets'—*δὸς δέ με γεγονέναι κατὰ τοὺς προφήτας*) the particular form that the process of redemption has wrought in the prophet's whole being—in accord with his active volition—during the moment of revelation. Similarly, spiritual reading becomes the key to our own sanctifying imitation of the *bios prophetikos*,[87] the form of the reader's own life energized by the form of the prophet's mind permanently infused in the form of the text.

Origen understands that this 'form' will vary, of course, according to God's particular teaching aims in any given book or text. Prophecy, after all, is given for the benefit of others besides the prophet. Yet Origen always posits a dynamic correlation-in-unity between the prophet's experience of the Word and the qualities of the inspired word and text. This fact helps to explain the otherwise mysterious claim of *Against Celsus* that the prophets possess transfigured bodies during the prophetic act:

From this ground, by collecting evidence from the sacred Scriptures, we prove that the prophets among the Jews, being illuminated by the divine Spirit in so far as it was beneficial to them as they prophesied (*ἐλλαμπόμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θείου πνεύματος τοσοῦτον, ὅσονἦν καὶ αὐτοῖς τοῖς προφητεύουσι χρήσιμον*), were the first to enjoy the visitation of the superior Spirit to them. Because of the touch, so to speak, of what is

[85] *Hom. in Lc.* 15 (*SC* 87. 236), tr. Lienhard, 64.

[86] *Ὁ γὰρ μέλλων εἰρηνοποιεῖν τὸν κόσμον παρεγένετο, ὁ σύναπτων τὸν οὐρανὸν τῇ γῇ, ὁ κατασκευάζων τὴν γῆν οὐρανὸν διὰ τῆς εὐαγγελικῆς διδασκαλίας*, *Hom. in Lc.* 15, frag. 42 (*SC* 87. 492), my translation.

[87] *Hom. in Jer.* 15.1 (*GCS* 6. 125): *μιμεῖσθαι τὸν βίον τὸν προφητικόν*.

called the Holy Spirit upon their soul they possessed clear mental vision and became more radiant in their soul, and even in body (*ἀφῆς τοῦ καλουμένου ἁγίου πνεύματος διορατικώτεροι τε τὸν νοῦν ἐγίνοντοκαὶ τὴν ψυχὴν λαμπρότεροι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα*), which no longer offered any opposition to the life lived according to virtue, in that it was mortified according to 'the mind of the flesh' as we call it.[88]

In the visible practice of virtue and self-control, the prophet's body shows forth the unseen intellectual radiance of the soul.[89] But Origen also undoubtedly has in mind here the astonishing radiance of Moses' face in Exodus 34: 29. Like Origen's teaching about all prophets generally, this biblical story makes the prophet's encounter with God to be the cause ('because he had been talking with God') of a profound physical transformation ('the skin of his face shone') associated with the transmission of a sacred text ('the two tablets of the covenant').

While not diminishing the distinctiveness of the Sinai event, Origen extrapolates from it a general principle that we might summarize as follows: prophesying changes the whole prophet. The conformation of the prophet to the unity of the revealed book illuminates his intellect with a glory that shines with the specific brightness of the *logos* imparted. Origen identifies this 'glory' (*δόξα*), specifically when it shone from Moses' face, as 'the visible glory of God that is contemplated by that mind which has the aptitude for such contemplation because of its pre-eminent purification'[90] and also as a 'deification of his intelligence' (*θεοποιηθέντος αὐτῷ τοῦ νοῦ*).[91]

More than this, however, the passage quoted just above shows that this particular glory cascades downward, ontologically, to transfigure the prophet's body in its very materiality. Thus, while one might justifiably describe Origen's doctrine of prophecy as 'rational', since it gives priority to intellectual acts, one could not do it justice by

[88] *Cels.* 7.4 (*SC* 150. 20).

[89] On virtue and continence as an extension of the Bride-soul's 'immense glory' (*decus ingens*) and 'new and extraordinary beauty of form' (*species formae nova ac mirabilis*), by divine power, to the body, see *Cant.* 3.2.7–8 (*SC* 376. 504–6).

[90] *καὶ τῷ ἐπιτηδείῳ δι' ὑπερβολὴν καθαρότητος νῷ θεωρούμενα δόξα ἂν λέγοιτο εἶναι θεοῦ ὀφθεῖσα*, *Jo.* 32. 338 (*SC* 385. 332), tr. Heine, 406.

[91] *Jo.* 32. 339 (*SC* 385. 334); my translation.

describing it as an exclusive 'rationalism', as for example do H. Koch, and R. P. C. Hanson.[92] The prophet's intellectual glory does not exclude his capacity for affection towards God, his particularity, or his corporeality. Rather, this glory transforms the whole person by including the whole person.

In this way, then, Origen associates with the prophets an especially intense degree of that participation in divine being (*ὁ ὤν*) whereby all 'the saints' (*οἱ ἅγιοι*) are redeemed from the non-being (*οὐκ ὄντων*) of sin and divinized so as to become 'those who are' (*ὄντων*). In the following passage from the *Commentary on the Letter to the Ephesians*, he draws this soteriological doctrine of participated being from Paul's words in Ephesians 1: 1 (*τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν χριστῷἸησοῦ*):

It is not only with reference to the Ephesians that we find the expression 'to the saints who are', and we ask what, if it is not superfluous to add the phrase 'those who are' to the phrase 'to the saints', the phrase might mean. See then if it is not that just as he who named himself to Moses in Exodus gave his name as Being (*ὤν*), so likewise those who participate in 'he who is' become 'those who are' (*οἱ μετέχοντες τοῦ ὄντος γίνονται ὄντες*), named as though they have passed from non-being to being.[93]

Again, Origen presents Moses as a model of prophetic experience. Having received the revelation of God's nature as 'he who is' (*ὁ ὤν*), Moses comes to typify all those saints who both see that God 'is' and thus become as God is, receiving a real though acquired and accidental immutability in the possession of the good.[94] Thus the

[92] See Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis*, 342; Hanson *Allegory and Event*, 218–19.

[93] 'The Commentary of Origen upon the Epistle to the Ephesians', ed. J. Gregg, *JTS* 3 (1901–2), 235. Cited with translation in P. Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God*, 33. For a more complete discussion of Origen's interpretation, with specific reference to the saints, see Widdicombe, 31–4.

[94] While *On First Principles* subordinates the question of the saints' eternal security to the principle of freedom, to such an extent that it seems Origen contemplated the possibility of repeated and freely elected falls from beatitude, Origen's later writings develop as a soteriological doctrine a premise that *On First Principles* applies uniquely to the pre-existent soul of Jesus: that this soul was 'joined so firmly in love to God' that it became 'one spirit' in nuptial union with Him, 'the result being that by firmness of purpose, immensity of affection, and an inextinguishable warmth of love all susceptibility to change or alteration was destroyed, and what formerly depended upon the will was by the influence of long custom changed into nature'; see *Princ.* 2.6.3–4 (*SC* 252. 314–20). The same principle of an acquired yet unbreakable union

prophets anticipate in their own being that ultimate state in which God shall be the Being of beings as 'All in all'.

This transformation of prophetic being must, on principle, apply to Solomon as well. Indeed, we should perhaps understand it to apply *especially* to Solomon, given that Origen understands the transmission of the Song to occupy the zenith of prophetic experience, at least within the ordained limits of the canon. This is, moreover, the very experience that the Song is meant to impart, pedagogically, to the reader, if only he can bear the instruction. Positioning the teaching of the Song relative to that of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Origen writes:

> This book comes last that a man may come to it when his manner of life has been purified, and he has learnt to know the difference between things corruptible and things incorruptible; . . . when the soul has completed these studies [in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes], by means of which it is cleansed of all its actions and habits and is led to discriminate between natural things, it is competent to proceed to dogmatic and mystical matters, and in this way advances to the contemplation of the Godhead with pure and spiritual love.[95]

Solomon, as the Bride who prophesies the whole *logos* of the Song, is the first beneficiary of the 'contemplation of the Godhead' (*divinitatis contemplatio*) that, as we have shown, is the in-forming reality of the Song. In this way, Origen shows that at the moment of the Song's inspiration, Solomon advances wholly into that prophetic *pax Christi* which his name—the 'Peaceable One'—already signifies. By the grace of the divine Bridegroom, Solomon himself becomes the paradigmatic θεῖος ἄνηρ, who by sharing fully in the peaceable economy of divine initiatives bequeaths the Song of Songs as a gift empowered to

with the Logos appears in the *Commentary on the Song*, yet this time applied broadly to all those who will, like Jesus' soul, become the Logos' Bride: 'What strength, what vigour will these maidens get from it, if ever they are able by some means to attain to His actual, incomprehensible, unutterable Self? I think myself that if they ever did attain to this, they would no longer walk or run, but, bound as it were by the bands of His love, they would cleave to Him, and would have no further power ever to move again (*sed vinculis quibusdam caritatis eius adstrictae adhaerent ei nec ultra mobilitatis alicuius ullus in iis resideat locus*)', *Cant.* 1.4.9 (*SC* 375. 224) = Lawson (1.3), 77.

95 *Cant.* prol. 3.16 (*SC* 375. 138)

initiate Christians into that same perfect contemplation, love, and peace.[96]

The direction of Origen's thought would suggest, therefore, that the revelation of the Song also imparted the greatest share of salvific radiance to Solomon's very flesh. Being fully assimilated to the 'spirit', the limitations of corporeal being would no longer apply even to Solomon's own body. 'Body', in the event of the Song, has become 'spiritual body'—even 'spirit' itself. Thus, the principle of 'conformity to the resurrection' (*conformes resurrectionis eius*; cf. Phil. 3: 10), which Origen introduces in his discussion of the 'true Gold' to describe the Christian's 'rising' from physical to superphysical forms of being, would thus be seen to apply to Solomon, appropriately, in a pre-eminent and exemplary way.[97] Such a bold conception of Solomon's form of corporeal being at the time of the Song's revelation is certainly at one with Origen's doctrine of prophecy and his high conception of 'Solomon's' identity—as human prophet, with and as the heavenly Bridegroom—in the Song itself. Origen's reasoning demands that even the prophet Solomon himself must be understood as 'incorporeal', so to speak, in transmitting the 'bodiless' Song.

Seen in light of a doctrine of the bodily transfiguration of prophets, Origen's conception of the Song as a fully 'bodiless' text, even at the register where it is also a 'whole body', becomes more intelligible. He has set in place a theological apparatus that requires an exact correspondence between the being of the prophet, the degree of the prophet's union with the Logos, and the special qualities and properties of the prophetically revealed text. The Song's special character proceeds from the unique and unqualified identity that its prophet, Solomon, shares with the one true Bridegroom in the *logos* of the text.

[96] On the 'divine man' as (1) speaker of words that directly effect change, and (2) as participant in and agent of a hidden divine economy of peace, see E. V. Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus*, SBL Dissertation Series 64 (Chico, Calif., 1982), 44–5, 139–40. For a more general and comprehensive study of the 'divine man' motif in late antiquity and early Christianity, see L. Bieler, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ: Das Bild des 'göttlichen Menschen' in Spätantike und Frühchristentum* (2 vols.) 1935 and 1936 (repr. Darmstadt, 1976).

[97] *Cant.* 2.8.28 (*SC* 375. 422).

SUMMARY REMARKS

In Chapter 4, our examination of the Song's 'whole body'—its character as a unitive text organized by a single *logos*—began by demonstrating that Origen approaches every individual book of Scripture as a discrete revelatory event. The prophet, Origen thinks, stands in the centre of this event. Through him the surrounding context of corporeal place (*topos*) and historical time (*kairos*) conditions the *logos* of the whole book with a somatic character, and in this way, the book's 'body' becomes the foundation for a spiritual reading.

This chapter has shown that Origen situates the event in which the Song is sung as epithalamium (i.e. the 'upper register') in a *topos* that is not local and a *kairos* that is not temporal. Hence, the contextual variables that root all other biblical books and their revelation in the soil of historical reality have, in the unique instance of the Song, been elevated to a spiritual, heavenly, and eschatological order. Thus, the Song's eschatologically conditioned *logos*—while yet standing in the expected formative relation to all of the Song's discursive elements—constitutes the 'whole body' of the text as 'bodiless' in the strictest sense, that is, as a purely spiritual and intelligible reality in which not the least trace of sensibility can be discerned.

I propose, then, that in the Song Origen discerns prophecy raised to its most complete expression. In the Song, all real distinctions between book, text, context, and speaker are dissolved. But, I argue, this dissolution is not a negation of these beings but, rather, an affirmation in being, achieved as each feature is assimilated fully to the unity of the Logos in his self-disclosure as the eschatological Lord and Lover. But this is to say that the Song draws its whole character exclusively from the Bridegroom himself. Since this Bridegroom is pure 'spirit', the 'whole body' of his Song must exist after the manner of 'spirit' as well.

Thus, as for Solomon himself, the Song's true limit as text shows its 'whole body' really to be 'spiritual body' and, indeed, perfect 'spirit'. The 'body' of the Song radiates the pure, intellectual glory

that is the 'end' of all being. In its deepest centre, the Song of Songs is the nuptial *thalamum*, the mind and voice of the Bridegroom—in short, the perfect textual manifestation of the 'perfect mystery' into which all Scripture ultimately aims to initiate the soul.

Conclusion: the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture

The preceding investigation has aimed to establish definitively the real limits to which Origen strives to expand our conception of the Song's 'bodilessness' and, hence, of its spiritual character as well. To Origen's mind, so I have argued, this 'bodiless' quality suffuses the text of the Song not in part, but entirely, in its every dimension and at every register on which one can read it. He understands the Song to be 'total allegory' in the fullest sense imaginable, without qualifications of any kind.

Origen's aim in developing his fully asomatic reading of the Song is, emphatically, not simply to protect the reader from sensuality. Even if he is moved to some degree by a psychological or ascetical aversion to sexuality—a thesis that, upon examination, we cannot accept on grounds already discussed in Chapter 2—this could not alter the fact that he occupies himself above all with finding a way to read the Song that is not only consistent with but also demanded by his principles of interpretation. These principles, in turn, must be rooted in his theology of inspiration and, with particular reference to the Song, the nuptial and divinely erotic foundations of all prophetic experience, now exemplified in Solomon as the author and speaker of the Song.

Furthermore, if we are to identify the hermeneutical roots of Origen's conviction that the Song possesses an unrestricted 'incorporeality', it is not enough to observe vaguely that he has read the Song as a 'bodiless' text and leave it at that. An exacting investigation of the meaning of 'body' and 'bodilessness' is required. And what we have discovered through such an investigation is that Origen simply

does not apply the concepts of 'body' and 'bodilessness' to the Song univocally. Rather, their exact value varies according to the depth of his inquiry into the order of principles out of which emerge not only the Song's meaning and significance but also its form—manifest and hidden—as text.

At the most superficial level, this 'bodilessness' characterizes the entrancing love-centred themes of the Song (*erôs*, the mutual delight of lovers, nuptial congress) and the poetry of desire in which they are expressed. Next, more deeply, Origen understands this 'bodilessness' to transform the entire love-drama that unfolds in the Song. His reading does not simply shift the 'to-and-fro' of the Song's nuptial actions to an order of being that is visible only to the mind's eye. Instead, it moves the drama altogether beyond the powers of imagination—a faculty that Origen allies closely with the soul's carnal sensibility—to an order of word and spirit that so completely surpasses things corporeal that it can only properly be apprehended by a movement of the intellect, not envisioned by an act of the imagination.

When Origen portrays the wedding drama of the Song as an utterly asomatic *fabula*, then, he means equally that it is an utterly intelligible, hence purely spiritual, reality—a play of Word and Spirit. Likewise, he would not have us conceive of the drama-conversation of the Song in any way other than as a purely spiritual exchange of minds, sharing the *intelligibilia* of divine love. The coursing voices of Bridegroom and friends, Bride and maids should be 'heard' not as mere sounds but rather as a coinherence of shared understandings. The Song therefore demands of us a most difficult noetic leap beyond even the faintest sensible imagination of its *colloquia*.

Origen's reading, therefore, does not support a formal distinction between the dramatic 'comings and goings' of the Song's several dramatic players and the dialogical movement—the 'back-and-forth'—of their conversation. The flow of conversation between the Bridegroom, the Bride, and the other players is the nuptial drama. Since this wholly spiritual conversation is one and the same as the read text of the Song, which subsists entirely in the verbal-noetic order, the Song's discursive structure must, necessarily, be the immediate form of the 'bodiless' drama. In other words, even at this 'lower register', Origen's exposition develops the whole text (i.e. the 'whole

body') of the Song as an asomatic reality. For the words of the text, as the real and living words of Bridegroom and Bride, are fully submerged—or, better, *supra*merged—in a sphere of being and act that exceeds all things bodily, since it is wholly spiritual.

The full extent of the Song's asomatic character appears only when the 'upper register' of the book comes into the reader's view. For, on Origen's understanding, only here does the book present itself as a 'whole body', that is, as a unity of parts informed and organized by a single *logos*. As we saw in Chapter 4, the Song's *logos*, as with any inspired text, is the original germ and foundation of the text's spiritual meaning. In the Song, it holds within its own unity all the subsisting parts (dramatic actions, words, characters), and together these form the 'whole body' that is the text of the Song.

The Song is utterly *asômatos*, Origen shows us, because its *logos* proceeds entirely from a mind fully conformed to the final—and nuptial—cause of all rational existences. This *logos*, Origen thinks, originates uniquely from the divine Bridegroom, apart from any historical context or finite mediation. The supreme speech-act discerned by Origen in the Song is the unique 'mystical utterance' of the Bridegroom himself, singing the 'whole body' of the Song to his Bride. This speech-act or utterance provides the creative matrix of the whole text, and all of the lesser discursive virtualities of the text—such as those in the dramatic aspect of the Song—are contingent on it. When heard as 'epithalamium', the Song is also heard to reveal—and create—the nuptial drama. Origen's reading effectively removes the entire text itself to a spiritual order perceptible only to the spiritual sensorium of a cultivated understanding.

Hence, in reading the Song as 'Solomon's' (i.e. the Peaceable Christ's) solo performance, Origen hears the Bridegroom alone singing the primordial and eternal marriage-song whereby he becomes 'one spirit' with his Bride. The prophet Solomon's utter and entire conformity to the Bridegroom at the moment of inspiration mirrors—indeed, concretely realizes—the whole nuptial mystery that is both represented and embodied in the text of the Song. In Origen's metaphysics of participation, such total conformity as we have described here is a mode of identity imparted through grace actuated in love. We must conclude, then, that only a reading that perceives the text of the Song as limited exclusively by the superhistorical, purely

intelligible being of the Bridegroom-Logos can ultimately be counted as adequate to Origen's judgement of the text. The reader cannot legitimately partition any part or aspect of the Song's 'upper register' to ascribe to an embodied, or even finite, speaker. As the Song's perfected recipient, he is wholly Bride. But as the perfect singer of the text, Solomon is wholly and truly Bridegroom.

By locating the 'Solomon' of the Song in a heavenly *kairos* and *topos*, Origen likewise transfers the Song's whole *logos*—the creative centre of its reality as text—to a pneumatic, 'bodiless' order of being. For Origen, 'bodilessness' modifies the Song in a way that increasingly shortens the span between all the ordered aspects of the text's 'whole body' and the quality of 'bodilessness' itself. The higher one's gaze rises towards the *holos logos*—the most extreme limit—of the Song, the more one discerns a spiralling intensification of this 'bodiless' quality into the very heart and seat of the text *qua* text.

In the final analysis, Origen finds himself unable to distinguish the Song's form (i.e. the text and its structure) from its supreme and abiding quality (i.e. 'incorporeality'). At the outermost limit (i.e. the *logos*) of the Song itself, 'body' and the 'bodilessness' of 'spirit' converge. Thus when Origen denies any 'corporeal connotation' to the words and expressions of the Song (including the name 'Solomon'), he has not simply negated the positive value of the text's 'literal sense'. On the contrary, his denial amounts to an affirmation of the Song's literal sense at the highest level. To Origen's mind, the Christian who reads the Song rightly (i.e. according to its only proper sense—the 'spirit') already moves in an atmosphere of purely spiritual conceptions. In other words, the text of the Song is so fully *asomatic* precisely because it is so fully *pneumatic*.

The Song is the uniquely 'bodiless' Scripture because it is that text which reveals and presents what Origen elsewhere calls the 'spirit' of Scripture. Succinctly formulated, Origen presents the Song as nothing less than *the spirit of Scripture itself*, revealed in its essential nature as Christ the Word's eschatological song of nuptial love. Whereas all other canonical books conceal the 'spirit' under the 'letter', which veils the 'spirit' even as it mediates its disclosure, the Song conveys the same 'spirit' without any occlusion whatsoever. In the Song, the 'body' of Scripture has become not merely translucent to the 'spirit' but transparent to it. Thus, following Origen's indications, what the

reader 'sees' and 'hears' in the Song is not only a pedagogy in the contemplative arts but the Object of the contemplation itself.

In the Song, then, Origen does not simply discover a perfect teaching that leads to union with the Bridegroom. At the Song's 'upper register', he finds the aim of this perfect teaching realized in the form of the text itself. The Song does not merely expound, teach, or signify the 'perfect mystery' of the supercelestial bridal-chamber. It is the real presentation of that mystery in and through the specifically intelligible being of a text.

This assessment of the Song allows Origen to affirm that in, through and by this very text, the reader may enter the fullest knowledge of incorporeal being in its highest aspect—as God, the Bridegroom, Lover, Spouse, and Wedding-Chamber of the spirit. The Song's *logos* is, in every sense, the divine Logos himself, coming to the reader (as Bride) from the chambers of his eternal advent. It is to this special mode of the Logos' manifestation in the Song that Origen ultimately traces its unqualified and absolute incorporeality. Indeed, to this he accounts every facet of the text, and every facet is a mystery—the supreme mystery of God the 'All in all' in his Bridegroom-Logos, who is indeed 'one spirit' with his fully perfected Bride.

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